



Conference: Digital and sexual citizenship in an
age of social media bans: Interrogating the rights
of children and young people

6-8 July, 2026

Conference information and abstracts



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About this conference

Many Western countries, including Australia, are signatories to the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child. Nonetheless, the rights of children and adolescents are increasingly impacted by laws, such as the recent social media ban; and by policies prohibiting students' use of mobile phones in schools. Often, children's views on laws and policies that impact their rights are either not sought at all or paid scant attention. This is in contravention of Article 12 which grants all children who are capable of forming their own views the right to express them freely in all matters that affect them, requiring that these views are "given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child."

Adults' fears around children's digital media use are the latest in a long line of techno-panics. Such fears are increasingly likely to result in outright removal of access, as with school phone bans, and the recent ban on social media accounts for children under 16. Meanwhile, a suite of industry codes, developed with the Digital Industry Group Inc (DIGI) and approved by the Office of the eSafety Commissioner – with the most recent codes coming into force on 9 March – will affect services used by Australians of all ages. When fully realised these codes will impact search engines, online games, social media messaging, AI companions and chatbots, app stores and equipment manufacturers and suppliers.

The law continues to lag behind young people's digital customs and practices. This is the case with intimate digital communication, for example, where consensual sexual images shared between consenting minors remains illegal, while consenting adults are at perfect liberty to 'sext' each other. While safety is paramount, concerns about under-18s' media use need to be balanced with young people's rights as digital and sexual citizens.

Materials that have been available to teens in the past will increasingly be restricted by age checks and other gatekeeping mechanisms, even though content that some adults deem risky has been identified by many teens as providing life-affirming connections and community, particularly for marginalised young people. Indeed, many youth-focused organisations are concerned that education and support materials provided by, with and for young people may soon be locked behind age-restriction prohibitions. Proponents of these bans assert that children are not old enough to know better: young people would beg to differ.

Keynotes

Young people's access to comprehensive sexuality education and information is a human rights issue

Katrina Marson (University of Sydney)

Monday, 6 July, 6:00 pm

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-banunder-16s-australia>>, accessed 11/11 2025. [2] Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Bill 2024 Explanatory Memorandum, at [40] and [41].

Bio:

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.



Keynotes

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

Professor Tama Leaver (Curtin University)

Tuesday, 7 July, 9:30 am

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.

Bio:

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.



Keynotes

Sexual shame and healthy sexual development

Professor Alan McKee (University of Sydney)

Tuesday, 7 July, 1:45 pm

Healthy Sexual Development includes sexual agency, open communication with trusted adults, and self-acceptance. Recent policy approaches to young people's digital media use have created a context that damages all three of these domains. Consuming pornography does not cause violence against women. Nevertheless, policy settings are based on this urban myth, and it is commonly accepted across Australia. This is problematic not only because such a focus takes time and effort away from the real causes of gendered violence, but also because it damages young people's healthy sexual development. Recent research with young people consistently shows a sense of shame around their masturbatory practices. They are not developing sexual agency by exploring and understanding their sexual interests. They are failing to develop self-acceptance of their sexual practices. And they are not experiencing open communication with trusted adults. We must move to a model that prioritises communication with young people – including listening to them instead of only talking at them – over censorship. I recommend that all adults who are supporting young people read and apply Talk Soon. Talk Often. published by the WA Department of Health – https://www.healthywa.wa.gov.au/articles/s_t/talk-soon-talkoften.

Bio:

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.



Keynotes

Young people's perspectives on age verification for online pornography

Associate Professor Megan Lim (Burnet Institute)

Wednesday, 8 July, 9:30 am

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.

Bio:

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.



Keynotes

Keynotes panel: Supporting digital participation and rights of children and young people: Considerations and priorities.

Keynotes and the Commissioner for Children and Young People,

Dr Jacqueline McGowan-Jones

Wednesday, 8 July, 2:45 pm

This panel brings together our keynote speakers for the conference: Katrina Marson, Professor Tama Leaver, Professor Alan McKee, and Associate Professor Megan Lim, in conversation with the Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, Dr Jacqueline McGowan-Jones. The panel will discuss the impact of the current social media ban, as well as associated industry codes, the law and digital communication in regards to young people, and digital communities and marginalised young people.

Bio:

Dr Jacqueline McGowan-Jones has an extensive background in education, child protection, Indigenous affairs, and suicide prevention. Her experience includes senior executive roles across state and federal governments, and the non-government sector.

As Commissioner, Jacqueline has a statutory responsibility to monitor, protect and advocate for the rights and wellbeing of all Western Australian children and young people. She firmly believes that all young people have a right to be heard, and actively works to foster a heightened level of understanding and engagement in matters that affect our children and young people.



Schedule

Tuesday 7 July		
8:30 - 9:00	Registrations	
9:00 - 9:30	Welcome to Country Announcements and Housekeeping	
9:30 - 10:30	Keynote: All stick, no carrot? Deploying Australia's social media ban for under16s Tama Leaver	
10:30 - 10:45	Morning Tea	
10:45 - 12:00	Stream 1: Sexuality (1) Chair: Marziya Mohammedali	Stream 2: Digital and Postdigital (1) Chair: Jess Hardley
	Panel: Centering Culture in Sexual Health Conversations Tanesha Bennell, Marziya Mohammedali, Zoe Sullivan	Panel: Face Value: Image culture, bodies, and identity on social media Amy Dobson, Julia Coffey, Kiah Hawker
		Young people's right to a human-centred Internet Sky Croeser
12:00 - 13:00	Stream 3: Sexuality and Religion Chair: Elle Thielke	Stream 4: Policy and Governance: Chair: Lelia Green
	Sharing the Gospel: Understanding Purity Culture Messaging and Media in Western Australia Gracie Cayley	From Moral Panic to Digital Paternalism: Rethinking Youth Social Media Governance John Sutcliffe
	The implementation of relationships and sexuality education (RSE) in faith-based schools: A scoping review Roisin Glasgow-Collins	How should parents react when government policy undermines children's digital citizenship? Lelia Green
13:00 - 13:45	Lunch	
13:45 - 14:45	Keynote: Sexual Shame and Healthy Sexual Development Alan McKee	
14:45 - 15:00	Afternoon Tea	
15:00 - 16:00	Stream 5: Listening to Young People Chair: Sian Tomkinson	Stream 6: Rights and Participation Chair: Chloe Clements
	Young children's lived experiences of digital opportunities and risks Kylie Stevenson, Harrison See, Emma Jayakumar	Panel: Balancing Safety and Rights: Rethinking Social Media Bans Youth Pride Network
	Constructions of 'harm': Why under-18's perspectives matter Kelly Jaunzems, Giselle Woodley, Lelia Green, Sian Tomkinson	
16:00 - 16:30	Advancing research that supports the development of integrated, multi-sector future frameworks for sexual health promotion and education for young people Matthew Oxford, Alexis Pallister	
16:30 - 16:45	Close of Day	

Wednesday 8 July	
9:00 - 9:30	Registrations
9:30 - 10:30	Keynote: Young people's perspectives on age verification for online pornography Megan Lim
10:30 - 10:45	Morning Tea
10:45: - 12:00	Stream 7: Citizenship Chair: Lelia Green
	Stream 8: Digital and Postdigital (2) Chair: Jess Hardley
	Panel: Children's and young people's digital citizenship in the Asia-Pacific <i>Crystal Abidin, Terence Lee, Harrison See, Lelia Green</i> Panel: We have never been digital: Reflections on a postdigital society <i>Laura Giltos, Jess Hardley and Andrew Hutcheon</i> "Nothing About Us Without Us": Young People, Social Media Regulation, and Digital Sexual Citizenship <i>Casey Moller</i> Digital Literacy and Sexual Citizenship: Supporting young people with disability in online spaces <i>Emily Louise Castell</i>
12:00 - 13:00	Stream 9: Sexuality (2) Chair: Madlson Godfrey
	Stream 10: Communication and Campaigns Chair: Catherine Archer
	The missing voices in porn literacy education: How can we equip teens with greater protective levels of porn literacy when we don't even possess that knowledge ourselves? <i>Elle Thielke</i> Managing New Nicotine Products (Vapes and Nicotine Pouches) on Social Media <i>Kahlia McCausland</i> Panel: Young People's Digital Rights: Accessing relationships, sexuality, and health information online <i>Giselle Woodley, Katrina Marson, Leon Huxtable, Elle Thielke</i> Off the phone and onto the footy field: The social media minimum age 'wellbeing' campaign and the surfacing of tired 'Australian' ideals <i>Suzanne Sdarov</i> Genuine listening or political point scoring by a PM? Motivations and strategic communication processes behind Australia's U/16 social media ban <i>Catherine Archer</i>
13:00 - 13:45	Lunch
13:45 - 14:30	Stream 11: State of Play Chair: Sian Tomkinson
	Stream 12: Impacts Chair: Lelia Green
	The right to play, volunteer burden and digital entanglement <i>Andrew Hutcheon</i> Silenced Online: The Impact of Social Media Bans on LGBTQIA+ Youth Rights and Wellbeing <i>Chloe Clements</i> The Teachers of Fascination: We listen because we want to, not because we have to <i>Lauri Parr, Christina Pollard</i> Australia's Children's Online Privacy Code: Affording rights to protection and participation <i>Anna Bunn</i>
14:30 - 14:45	Afternoon tea
14:45 - 16:00	Supporting digital participation and rights of children and young people: Considerations and priorities Keynote Panel with Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, Jacqueline McGowan-Jones Chair: Giselle Woodley
16:00 - 16:30	Closing session: Conference Team
END	

Stream 1: Sexuality (1)

Panel: Centering Culture in Sexual Health Conversations

Tanesha Bennell (WAAC), Marziya Mohammedali (ECU/Rainbow Futures WA),

Zoe Sullivan (Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia)

Existing sexual health information and initiatives around young people tend to focus on dominant discourses and rarely factor in the nuances and critical differences that come from cultural identity, background, expectations and experiences. This panel is a conversation around leading with culture, centering the needs and experiences of culturally minoritised young people, particularly questioning how current models of sexual health education work with - or fail - racialised groups. We bring together Aboriginal and migrant perspectives, through research, community outreach, and lived experience, to discuss how we might address the needs of young people who do not see themselves or their cultural experiences reflected in current sexual health campaigns or education.

Bios:

Tanesha Bennell is a Bibulmun Noongar with connections to Ballardong and Whadjuk Country on Noongar Boodja. They are a passionate First Nations advocate and community organiser co-founding the youth collective Boorloo Justice in 2020. Tanesha's role is a unique partnership between WAAC, Rainbow Futures and ECU to promote the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ peoples and communities. Part of this role at WAAC is working as a Population Health and community development officer focusing around education, and uplifting the voices and perspectives of First Nations people within the sexual health, BBVs and LGBTIQ+ spaces.

Stream 1: Sexuality (1)

Dr Marziya Mohammedali makes trouble through photography, art, design, and research. They explore activism and social justice through multidisciplinary creative practices. They are the deputy editor of the pan-African creative collective Jalada Africa, and have published and exhibited their work internationally. They completed a PhD in 2025 at Edith Cowan University, focusing on identity, protest, and photography.

Zoe Sullivan (she/her) is a Murri, her mob is Bindal and Wulgurukaba from the Townsville and surrounding island areas. Zoe grew up mostly on Gubbi Gubbi Country (Sunshine Coast). She moved to Boorloo in 2021 to study a Masters in Sexology at Curtin University after completing a Health Science Bachelor Degree. Zoe begun her current role as the Sexual Health and Blood Borne Virus Program Coordinator at the Aboriginal Council of WA 4 months ago. In this role Zoe supports and advocates for the Aboriginal health sector, delivers training and educational resources and provides cultural expertise to government and non-government organisations to shape sexual health and BBV interventions for Aboriginal people in WA. Zoe has previously worked in both program coordination and program officer roles in sexual health programs, delivering relationship and sexual health education and health promotion to young people and professionals, working in outreach for a needle and syringe program and working as a LGBTIQ+ youth peer educator.

Stream 2: Digital and Postdigital (1)

Panel: Face Value: Image culture, bodies, and identity on social media

Amy Dobson (Curtin University), Julia Coffey (University of Newcastle), Kiah Hawker (University of Queensland)

Young people today must navigate a rapidly changing digital landscape of self-presentation and appearance, in which they are expected to regularly post photographs of themselves. Selfies have been widely studied as a cultural phenomenon, a means of sociality, and an expression of digital embodiment. Selfie-editing apps like Facetune and Faceapp provide professional-quality photoshopping and airbrushing editing tools, enabling a user to 'effortlessly enhance the attractiveness of their selfie'. Selfie editing apps have come into widespread use at a time when body and image-based appearance pressures are pervasive and enduring issues of concern for young people and for youth organisations and policy-makers.

In this panel we chart how young people are navigating a world in which 'editing the self(ie)' has become the norm, reporting on our 3-year study with 89 young people using interviews and creative visual workshops. We explore the challenges, opportunities, and complex social and emotional experiences young people face navigating the demands of mediated selfhood online.

First, we detail the range of practices our participants described, from 'light' to 'heavy' editing, and unpack how different kinds of editing practices are framed through boundaries of acceptability in an image culture where attempts at perfection are at once expected, yet highly moralised and policed by peers. Participants described how different editing practices carried distinct weight, aligning with moral judgments surrounding self-presentation. We explore the 'affective frictions' our participants articulate that help us more fully appreciate the complexities, ambivalences and significance of image editing practices for

Stream 2: Digital and Postdigital (1)

young people's experience of embodiment in contemporary visual digital cultures. Second, we examine the evolution of AR (augmented reality)/AI (artificial intelligence) filters which have become everyday instruments in digital media's visual and participatory cultures. They are part of a 'virtual gaze' that apprehends bodies as editable data. We explore how this gaze is navigated and experienced by everyday users in a context where gendered and racialised beauty standards inform norms of visibility and value. Increasingly 'live' automated filters and in-app editing now mediate faces and bodies at the point of capture, shifting the types of modifications to the face and body taking place and the level of agency and conscious decision making involved for young people.

Third, we interrogate the lenses of risk and psycho-pathology which typically frame young people's digital and selfie cultures. We explore narratives in our interview data around participants' sense of self-image, self-acceptance, and mental health as related to selfie-editing. Keenly aware of the gendered and racialised pressures of contemporary visual social media cultures, many of the young people we spoke with, most of whom identified as young women, non-binary and gender diverse, articulated an understanding of mental health as tied directly to editing practices. This resulted in a feedback loop whereby attributions of good or ill mental health were made based on images and levels of editing, with heavy editing practices often then associated with failure, weakness and a lack of control. These overdetermined discourses often leave little space for young people to articulate how they manage the pressures, pleasures and pain of participating in digitally mediated cultures of self-representation. We highlight the double set of pressures involved in detailed, sometimes "forensic" engagement with self-images in daily life, alongside the need to maintain "good" mental health and body-image.

Stream 2: Digital and Postdigital (1)

Bios:

Julia Coffey (she/her) is Associate Professor in Sociology at University of Newcastle. She is the lead of an Australian Research Council Discovery Project exploring young people's digital presentation and image-editing practices. She is the author of *Body Work: Youth, Gender and Health* (Routledge) and *Everyday Embodiment: Rethinking Youth Body Image* (2021, Palgrave Macmillan).

Amy Shields Dobson (they/them) is Associate Professor and program convenor for Digital and Social Media at Curtin University. They lead the Digital Intimacies research stream within Curtin's Centre for Culture and Technology, and are the author of *Postfeminist Digital Cultures* (2015), co-author of *Media and Society* (2025), and co- editor of *Postdigital Intimacies* (2026) and *Digital Intimate Publics and Social Media* (2018).

Kiah Hawker is a Lecturer in Communication at the University of Queensland in Brisbane. Her research explores augmented reality (AR) technologies—particularly filters—and their influence on self-representation within digital media platforms.

Stream 2: Digital and Postdigital (1)

Young people's right to a human-centered internet

Sky Croeser (Curtin University)

Academic and public analysis of social media bans focus on young people's relationship with commercial platforms like Tiktok and Instagram. In this writing, young people are often positioned as existing in the contested space between governmental control and platform affordances. The dangers and benefits of social media – and, largely, of Internet access more generally, which is so often mediated by large social media platforms – is seen as bounded by government regulation on one side and platform design on the other. Resistance, similarly, is seen as existing within these borders. This focus limits our imagination, not just of what young people's relationship with the Internet might look like, but also of the Internet itself. While many people do primarily access the Internet within the walled garden of commercial platforms, another Internet exists. Overlaid with the Internet of data-gathering, algorithms, and advertising, there is an Internet of people. An Internet that is community-run, and that prioritises community needs. This presentation asks what it would look like to make more space for young people in this Internet – as participants, co-creators, and active citizens. How would this change our understanding of what children's digital citizenship and agency could look like? And how might that ripple through possible futures for the Internet?

Bio:

Dr Sky Croeser is a researcher and teacher in the School of Media, Creative Arts and Social Inquiry at Curtin University. Her research focuses on people's movements to control the technologies of everyday life.

Stream 3: Sexuality and Religion

Sharing the Gospel: Understanding Purity Culture Messaging and Media in Western Australia

Gracie Cayley

In this paper, I present my research which examined the presence and performance of Purity Culture in contemporary Western Australia. Usually associated with American Evangelical Christianity, Purity Culture promotes public commitment to sexual abstinence before marriage through purity pledges and purity rings. My study identified the performance of Purity Culture in Western Australia consistent with existing American context, including the public performance of virginity, strict gendered expectations around sexuality, reliance on fear-based messaging, and limited discussions of consent and pleasure. Though Purity Culture is commonly associated with American contexts, to date little research has explored how it exists and operates outside the US. Utilising social media videos and audio as media elicitation tools, I conducted qualitative interviews with ten young Western Australian adults raised within Christian religious environments and established that Purity Culture and Purity Culture social media is present in the Western Australian context. Using Critical Discourse Analysis, I argue that contemporary Purity Culture in the Australian and US contexts operates through discourses of purity, taboo, gender, sexuality, and desire.

This paper demonstrates how this qualitative study contributes to existing scholarship by examining the transnational circulation of Purity Culture and Purity Culture media, demonstrating how purity discourses continue to shape understandings of sexuality, morality, and gender in contemporary Australian contexts.

Stream 3: Sexuality and Religion

Bio:

Gracie Cayley is an early-career qualitative researcher who is passionate about human-centered research and contexts. She has a particular research interest in young people's attitudes towards sexuality and gender, and their sexual and gender identities, especially within religious contexts. Gracie has an Honours degree in Anthropology and Sociology from Curtin University in Western Australia, with her Honours research completed under the supervision of Professor Farida Fozdar. In 2022, she received the Claire Mann Prize in Anthropology.

Gracie works as a Community Engagement Coordinator with Cancer Council WA where she applies her human-centred research ethic by conducting qualitative interviews and community activities that embed lived-experience voices in policy reform advocacy.

Stream 3: Sexuality and Religion

The implementation of relationships and sexuality education (RSE) in faith-based schools: A scoping review

Roisin Glasgow-Collins (Curtin University)

Introduction: Quality relationships and sexuality education (RSE) is integral young people's development as informed sexual citizens. However, access to comprehensive RSE remains varied, particularly in faith-based school contexts. This presentation reports on preliminary findings from a scoping review examining the current RSE practice and its enablers and barriers in faith-based schools across Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries.

Methods: Six academic databases (PsycInfo, CINAHL, ProQuest, ERIC, Web of Science and Scopus) were searched, alongside the first 100 results from a google search for grey literature.

Results: Publications were predominantly from Australia, Ireland and Northern Ireland, England, Canada, and the Netherlands, spanning Catholic, Protestant, Islamic and Jewish schools. RSE programs were frequently adapted to align with religious ethos, raising concerns about consistency and equity. When students received RSE, they valued it, foregrounding their agency and right to knowledge supporting wellbeing and sexual citizenship. Barriers included teacher confidence, curriculum overcrowding, opposition with religious teachings, and home-school tension. However, enablers included whole-school approaches, evidence-based curricula, and faith frameworks to contextualise RSE content.

Conclusion: Religious contexts should not determine the quality of RSE young people receive. At a time when young people's access to sexual knowledge is increasingly contested, ensuring equitable RSE across all school settings is a matter of rights, not preference.

Stream 3: Sexuality and Religion

Bios:

Roisin Glasgow-Collins (Presenting author): Roisin Glasgow-Collins (she/her) is a PhD Candidate at Curtin University's School of Population Health and Research Assistant within the Collaboration for Evidence, Research and Impact in Public Health (CERIPH), working with the Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Project. Her research interests centre on the sexual health and wellbeing of young people, with a particular focus on the role of comprehensive relationships and sexuality education (RSE) in supporting informed decision-making among youth populations. Her current PhD research examines the intersections of faith and RSE, and the implementation and delivery of RSE across faith-based schools in Australia.

Professor Sharyn Burns: Professor Sharyn Burns (she/her) is a health promotion practitioner and researcher with a specific interest in translation-al intervention-based research. Her research includes a specific focus on children, adolescents, young adults and parents and has been conducted in a range of settings with key focuses on sexual health, mental health, alcohol and other drugs and obesity prevention. Sharyn is a Chief Investigator on the RSE Project, a long term member of the Australian Health Promotion Association and currently a member of the National Accreditation Organisation Assessment Committee.

Associate Professor Jacqui Hendriks: Associate Professor Jacqui Hendriks (she/her) is a researcher within the Collaboration for Evidence, Research and Impact for Public Health (CERIPH). Her research and service focuses on young people and sexual wellbeing; with a particular focus on the provision of comprehensive relationships and sexuality education, work-force development and program evaluation. She is regularly engaged as an expert consultant for local, national and international working parties to improve current practices and to build workforce capacity. Jacqui currently manages the RSE Project providing training and support in the area of RSE to pre-service and in-service school teachers, is a member of the SiREN Project Management Committee, and is the Sexology Courses Coordinator in the Discipline of Health Promotion & Sexology at Curtin University.

Stream 4: Policy & Governance

From Moral Panic to Digital Paternalism: Rethinking Youth Social Media Governance

John Sutcliffe (Edith Cowan University)

Contemporary debates on youth social media use are frequently framed through the lens of Moral Panic Theory, emphasising cycles of public anxiety, media amplification, and reactive policymaking. While this framework remains useful for explaining the emergence of restrictive interventions, it offers limited insight into how such interventions are operationalised and sustained within increasingly complex digital environments. This paper argues that a conceptual shift is needed to account for the evolving mechanisms of governance shaping young people's online participation.

Introducing the concept of digital paternalism, the paper theorises a mode of governance in which young people's digital practices are pre-emptively shaped, constrained, and managed through technological and regulatory infrastructures. Unlike traditional paternalism, which operates through overt rules or guidance, digital paternalism is embedded within systems such as age verification technologies, platform design, and algorithmic moderation. These mechanisms are justified through protection-oriented narratives yet function to limit young people's autonomy, participation, and capacity to act as digital citizens.

The paper develops this framework through a critical analysis of Australia's recent social media regulation, positioning it as illustrative of a broader shift from discursive to infrastructural forms of control. It further interrogates the implications of this shift for youth rights, particularly in relation to participatory

Stream 4: Policy & Governance

principles articulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. By moving beyond moral panic as an explanatory framework, this paper contributes a conceptual lens for understanding the governance of youth in digital societies and calls for greater attention to the structural conditions shaping young people's online agency.

Bio:

Dr John Sutcliffe is a lecturer in the School of Arts and Humanities at Edith Cowan University where he teaches in the youth work program. John has extensive youth work experience in local government, homelessness, and education settings. His research includes professional careers in youth work, youth work practice and digital youth work.

Stream 4: Policy & Governance

How should parents react when government policy undermines children's digital citizenship

Lelia Green (Edith Cowan University)

This paper addresses the range of possible parents' responses to Australia's Under-16 social media ban. Is it a parent's job to prevent their child from seeing or engaging with challenging digital content? Or is their role one of guidance, protection and support? Which of these guiding principles might best prepare children to be effective, empathetic digital citizens?

Deconstructing the Albanese government's Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act 2024, implemented on 10 December 2025, a critical reader might deduce that the government had 'given up' on parents' capacities to protect their children online, and had moved instead to transition responsibility to the specific social media platforms addressed in the legislation. In effect, that reading suggests the government has decided that a parent's job had been to prevent children under 16 from engaging with certain social media options, and deemed those parents to have failed.

But what if parents were operating with a nuanced reading of their under-16 years old child's social media engagement, constructing it as a valuable preliminary to full digital citizenship at 18? What if those parents believe that their readings of their child's capacity to engage with content is more positive and nuanced than that implied by the promulgation of a ban? How should parents support their child's digital citizenship while not undermining their child's view of democratic processes?

Stream 4: Policy & Governance

Bio:

Lelia Green is Professor of Communications in the School of Arts and Humanities at Edith Cowan University and a Chief Investigator of the ARC Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child. She has been researching children's and parents' negotiations around under 18s' digital media use for over 25 years. Her latest book, *The Digital Child: Creating Confident Children*, is published by Monash University Publishing.

Stream 5: Listening to Young People

Young children's lived experiences of digital opportunities and risks

Kylie Stevenson (Murdoch University), Harrison See (Edith Cowan University), Emma Jayakumar (West Australian Opera)

This paper outlines qualitative research with children aged 3 to 13 years in India, Korea and Australia in which children were positioned as agentic stakeholders in their digital citizenship. Throughout this research, the researchers championed child-centred, participatory approaches. Children were given the opportunity to share their lived experiences of the digital world, including online risks, with researchers and each other through play-based research roundtables. This child-centred methodological approach reflected the researchers' commitment to adopting methods (for example, Literat, 2013) via which children could creatively and authentically voice their digital experiences. In this paper, authors share children's perspectives of digital opportunities for community, identity, creativity and play, all important counterpoints to risk. The authors share research findings that reflect 10 competencies (DQ Institute, 2023) pertinent to children's digital citizenship, illustrating how the children in this research perceived their digital lives, including how they navigated both the opportunities and online risks of their digital worlds. Project outcomes shared in this paper highlight how, with careful research design and communication of findings across participants, children's perspectives can be garnered in order to shape and influence policies and practices that impact children's digital lives.

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Bios:

Dr Kylie J Stevenson is an associate investigator with the Centre for the Digital Child, a nationally funded Australian Research Council (ARC) Centre of Excellence focusing on research about children aged birth to 8 years and digital technology. She is a Senior Lecturer at Murdoch University in Perth, Western Australia, where her role is Academic Chair of Graduate Research Training and Education. Kylie is also the Editor in Chief of Media International Australia (MIA) Journal, disseminating cutting edge research in the disciplines of media and communications. MIA is ranked Q1 in Communications and Cultural Studies. Kylie has led a Digital Child research project partnering with the LEGO Group (Asia Pacific) called Digital safety and citizenship roundtables, conducting research with children and adult policy makers in India, Korea and Australia. She is co-author of the book *Digital Media Use in Early Childhood: Birth to Six*, published by Bloomsbury in 2024, and co-editor of the *Routledge Companion to Digital Media and Children* (Routledge, 2021) and *Digitising Early Childhood* (Cambridge Scholars, 2019).

Dr Harrison Waed See is a researcher, creative practitioner, and lecturer at Edith Cowan University (ECU) and North Metro TAFE. His interdisciplinary research crosses Cultural Studies, Media and Communications, and Creative Practice. See's practice-led research focuses on studio collaboration as a means of intercultural and interdisciplinary dialogue, specifically, in the context of and shared

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storytelling within the Asia-Pacific; his qualitative research focuses on the digital experiences of young people and their families, utilising traditional and arts-based methodologies. Together, these research foci interrogate intersections between material and digital media/culture. See was a key researcher in an industry partnership between the LEGO Group and the ECU node of the ARC Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child about children's digital citizenship in India, South Korea, and Australia.

Dr Emma Jayakumar is an award winning Australian composer and academic with significant research experience utilising child-centred research methodologies. She is a former lead research officer with the ARC Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child. Emma is the author of two book chapters and her previous research focused on the composition of new and engaging music drama for children. Emma's ongoing research focuses on child-led and focused participatory research methods, compositional practice, and musicological projects. As a freelance classical composer and librettist specialising in chamber, orchestral and vocal music, Emma has created major commissioned works for many arts organisations, including the West Australian Opera, West Australian Ballet, Darwin Symphony Orchestra and the Australian Broadcasting Commission.

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Constructions of ‘harm’: Why under-18’s perspectives matter

Kelly Jaunzems, Giselle Woodley, Lelia Green, Sian Tomkinson (Edith Cowan University)

Young people use and are reliant on digital tools now more than ever. Despite widespread concerns about the risks and harms children and young people encounter in digital environments, research demonstrates a lack of nuance around what constitutes ‘harm’, and which content could be constructed as ‘harmful’. In fact, few researchers engage with under-18s around sensitive topics or subjects regarded as adult in nature. Instead, minors are constructed as lacking agency and competency in relation to ‘adult’ content. As such, much of the existing research relies on adults reflecting retrospectively on their earlier experiences, rather than examining the perspectives of those constructed as ‘experiencing’ harm. While retrospective accounts are valuable for understanding how perceptions of coming of age may shift over time, and for identifying broader social changes, they risk overlooking the nuances specific to the contemporary, and at times illicit, engagement of young people under 18. Grounding interventions, education, and preventative strategies in the lived realities of young people themselves, rather than adult’s reflections of their younger selves that may reflect different social, cultural, and generational values, is fundamental to reducing risks and creating safer digital environments.

Bios:

Sian Tomkinson is a media, culture, and philosophy scholar based in Perth, Western Australia. Much of her work focuses on intersections amongst gender, meaning-making, and media. Sian is working on projects that engage with

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perceptions of sex and sexuality, pornography, game design and play theory, and toxicity in digital communities.

Dr Giselle Woodley is a sexologist and works as a Lecturer and Post-doctoral Research fellow at the School of Arts and Humanities at Edith Cowan University in Australia. Giselle explores issues pertaining to sexuality, sexual violence, pornography, sexuality education, intimate communications, AI, image-based abuse, digital censorship and young people.

Lelia Green is Professor of Communications in the School of Arts and Humanities at Edith Cowan University and a Chief Investigator of the ARC Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child. She has been researching children's and parents' negotiations around under 18s' digital media use for over 25 years. Her latest book, *The Digital Child: Creating Confident Children*, is published by Monash University Publishing.

Stream 6: Rights and Participation

Panel: Balancing Safety and Rights: Rethinking Social Media Bans

Convened by Youth Pride Network

Dr Bep Uink (Aboriginal Health Info Net, Edith Cowan University), Isabella Choate (Youth Disability Advocacy Network), Troy Wood (Youth Pride Network), Raine Kirkman (Youth Pride Network), Soph Laver (Freedom Centre), Stevie Lane (Edith Cowan University)

Across Australia and other Western contexts, growing concern about young people's digital media use has led to increasingly restrictive policies, including social media age bans and school-based device prohibitions. While these measures are often framed as necessary to protect young people from harm, they raise critical questions about children's rights, agency, and access to connection, particularly for marginalised groups. This panel brings together researchers, youth advocates, and service providers to critically examine the unintended consequences of social media restrictions and explore how policy responses can better balance safety with young people's rights as digital citizens. Drawing on emerging qualitative research from Western Australia, the panel will highlight how social media functions as a vital space for identity exploration, peer connection, and access to mental health support for marginalised young people (LGBTIQ, Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander, Disabled, CaLD, and regional /remote). For many young people, particularly those in regional and rural communities, online platforms provide essential access to affirming communities and information that may not be available offline. Restricting access to these spaces' risks exacerbating social isolation, limiting help-seeking, and undermining protective factors that support wellbeing. These impacts are often overlooked in policy debates that prioritise risk mitigation without fully engaging with young peoples lived experiences.

Stream 6: Rights and Participation

The panel will situate these issues within broader discussions of children's rights, particularly Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which affirms young people's right to be heard in matters affecting them. Despite this, young people are rarely meaningfully consulted in the development of digital policies that directly shape their lives. This panel seeks to challenge that gap by centering youth voice and living experience in the conversation.

Panelists will include youth representatives, researchers with expertise in youth mental health and digital wellbeing, and service providers working directly with LGBTIQ+, Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander, Multicultural and Disabled young people. Together, they will explore key questions: What are the real-world impacts of social media restrictions on young people's wellbeing and connection? How can policy better account for the diverse experiences of marginalised young people? And what would youth-informed, rights-based approaches to digital safety look like in practice?

In addition to critical discussion, the panel will propose practical, evidence-informed alternatives to blanket restrictions, including co-designed policy approaches, improved digital literacy and safety education, and investment in both online and offline support systems. By bringing together multiple perspectives, this session aims to move beyond binary debates of "risk versus freedom" and instead advance more nuanced, balanced approaches to digital governance.

Ultimately, this panel contributes to ongoing conversations about digital citizenship by foregrounding the voices of young people and advocating policy responses that uphold both safety and rights.

Stream 6: Rights and Participation

Advancing research that supports the development of integrated, multi-sector future frameworks for sexual health promotion and education for young people

Matthew Oxford, Alexis Pallister (LaTrobe University)

Matt and Alexis are representatives from the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society (ARCSHS) Sexual Health and Wellbeing Team Youth Advisory Board (YAB). Over the past four years the YAB has worked alongside researchers and sexual health sector professionals to centre youth voices and call for comprehensive, accessible and realistic sexual health education and support.

The key project to come from the YAB is a series of recommendations which have been developed to help inform and advance research that supports the development of integrated, multi-sector future frameworks for sexual health promotion and education for young people. These recommendations have been created through gathering a series of perspectives from young people, professionals and other advisory boards and analysing what actions need to be taken to strengthen support for young people. These 12 recommendations have been presented at a National Youth Summit, ASHM Conference and Youth Webinar: Make Sex Ed Make Sense. They have been developed by young people, for young people and include the perspectives of diverse youth who are passionate about diminishing shame and advocating for comprehensive sexual health education.

During their session Matt and Alexis hope to speak to these recommendations alongside the effective co-design practices used to centre youth voices throughout the project, highlighting the importance of youth voice within the sexual health sector. The session will also include a question and answer portion where the sector can ask questions about the recommendations and ways to

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centre youth voices. These questions will be answered through a youth lens and allow for a rich exploration of how we can create change within the sexual health and youth sector.

Bios:

Matthew Oxford (he/him)

Matthew is a student nurse who is dedicated to promoting sexual health and wellbeing for everyone through the provision of quality sexual health care and education.

Alexis Pallister (she/her)

Alexis is a School Psychologist working in a regional town deeply passionate about the intersection between mental and sexual health and advocating for informed, healthy communities.

Stream 7: Citizenship

Panel: Children's and young people's digital citizenship in the Asia-Pacific

Crystal Abidin (Curtin University), Terence Lee (University of Nottingham Ningbo China), Harrison See (Edith Cowan University), Lelia Green (Edith Cowan University)

This panel comprises a discussion between Professor Crystal Abidin (Curtin University), Professor Terence Lee (University of Nottingham Ningbo China), and Dr Harrison W See (Edith Cowan University) addressing the construction and enactment of children's and young people's digital citizenship in the Asia-Pacific. It will be moderated by Professor Lelia Green (Edith Cowan University)

Drawing on original empirical ethnographic fieldwork and case studies from Asia Pacific and beyond, and spanning various digital platforms, Crystal Abidin's new *open access* book https://www.politybooks.com/bookdetail?book_slug=child-influencers-how-children-become-entangled-with-social-media-fame-9781509568024 looks at the emergence of child influencers and online fame more generally. Crystal's contribution will discuss key historical milestones, scandals, and the social and cultural contexts that have led to ordinary children becoming famous online, and how changing public discourse has resulted in important pivots in the ways this is perceived, and the implications such shifting perceptions have for children's and young people's digital citizenship. Addressing and challenging some of the moral panics raging against the visibility of children on social media and acknowledging the voice and agency of the children and young people, their parents and guardians – and the agents and managers who have been striving to improve the child influencer market through their everyday practices and community norms – Crystal's panel contribution will include case studies drawn from her ethnographic work in Singapore, South Korea, Thailand, and China.

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Terence Lee notes that most people in Australia, as indeed many liberal societies, understand ‘digital citizenship’ as relating to “the knowledge and skills individuals require to successfully participate in societies where digital media and technologies play a central role in daily life.” (M. Dezuanni, <https://digitalchild.org.au/what-is-digital-citizenship-and-how-can-australian-children-learn-about-it/>). Prima facie, Terence notes, this looks much the same in China. However, there are distinct yet subtle differences. Observers of China would hasten to add that digital technologies are already central in everyday lives of citizens. There are however subtle differences, including the very definition of digital citizenship which entails “everyday online practices, social participation, and identity formation of young people within state-regulated digital spaces”, including the many well-known platforms that dominate in China (Fu, 2021). These ideas are embodied in the national strategy of 数字中国 (‘Digital China’), making digital citizenship a subset of larger national discourse. In short, digital citizenship in China is largely about negotiating online skills with nationalistic values and navigating top-down social-cultural participation. This section of the panel offers some anecdotes about how young people navigate digital spaces via their social conduct on platforms primarily, but also in terms of how they represent their nation as Chinese citizens. Harrison W. See will discuss how, in an increasingly digitised and technically mediated world, an individual’s digital citizenship, or “ability to use digital technology and media in safe, responsible and ethical ways” (the DQ Institute) has never been more relevant, particularly when it concerns the youngest digital citizens. Navigating online spaces safely and confidently are skills fundamental to a modern individual’s social and emotional development, education, work, and play. A digital citizen’s abilities, however, are greatly impacted by notions of access; not just physical access, but also cultural and socioeconomic

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mediated access. Less is known about very young children's experiences of digital citizenship, and a range of commentators have noted that pandemic related events have accelerated moves to even greater online engagement. Such challenges posed to children's digital citizenship development require thoughtful, child-led, culturally nuanced, and research-based solutions. In response to this, industry partner-based research undertaken by Dr Kylie Stevenson, Dr Emma Jayakumar and Harrison himself addressed these challenges in the context of the Asia-Pacific region by engaging with child and adult stakeholders directly.

Bios:

Crystal Abidin is an anthropologist and ethnographer of internet cultures, focusing especially on internet celebrity, influencer cultures, and social media pop cultures, mostly in the Asia Pacific region. She has an international reputation of being a world-leading expert on influencer cultures and is an accomplished science communicator with research bridging academia, industry, and the public. Prof Crystal works as Professor of Internet Studies at Curtin University; Director of the Influencer Ethnography Research Lab; Associate Investigator at the ARC Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child; Co-investigator at the Korea Research & Engagement Centre; and Programme Lead of Social Media Pop Cultures at the Centre for Culture and Technology. She is also the Founder of the TikTok Cultures Research Network; and Affiliate Researcher with the Media Management and Transformation Centre at Jönköping University. She was formally Editor-in-Chief of Media International Australia.

Terence Lee is Professor in New Media, Communication and Cultural Studies at University of Nottingham Ningbo China, where he directs the interdisciplinary Digital Governance research priority area. He is Adjunct Professor in Media

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and Communication at Murdoch University, and is the Managing Editor of Communication Research and Practice journal.

Dr Harrison Waed See is a researcher, creative practitioner, and lecturer at Edith Cowan University (ECU) and North Metro TAFE. His interdisciplinary research crosses Cultural Studies, Media and Communications, and Creative Practice. See's practice-led research focuses on studio collaboration as a means of intercultural and interdisciplinary dialogue, specifically, in the context of and shared storytelling within the Asia-Pacific; his qualitative research focuses on the digital experiences of young people and their families, utilising traditional and arts-based methodologies. Together, these research foci interrogate intersections between material and digital media/culture. See was a key researcher in an industry partnership between the LEGO Group and the ECU node of the ARC Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child about children's digital citizenship in India, South Korea, and Australia.

Lelia Green is Professor of Communications in the School of Arts and Humanities at Edith Cowan University and a Chief Investigator of the ARC Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child. She has been researching children's and parents' negotiations around under 18s' digital media use for over 25 years. Her latest book, *The Digital Child: Creating Confident Children*, is published by Monash University Publishing.

Stream 7: Citizenship

"Nothing About Us Without Us": Young People, Social Media Regulation, and Digital Sexual Citizenship

Casey Moller (Headspace)

Social media is often viewed as a source of risk for young people, especially regarding sexual content, online safety, and proposed restrictions. However, these discussions rarely include meaningful input from the young people most affected. This presentation draws on co-designed work and engagement with diverse young people in community, mental health, and sexual health settings. It examines how platforms such as TikTok, Reddit, Discord, YouTube, Roblox, and emerging AI technologies are used to access information on relationships, sexuality, consent, identity, and sexual health. For many, especially marginalised young people and those in regional or remote areas, online spaces offer connection, identity exploration, peer support, and access to information unavailable offline.

The presentation addresses the gap between policy responses and young people's lived experiences, noting that restrictions are often easily bypassed and may increase isolation, loneliness, and exclusion for those without access. It also considers the lasting impact of COVID-19, during which many young people experienced key developmental milestones online. This presentation advocates for youth-informed, harm-reduction approaches that place young people at the centre of discussions on digital citizenship and online safety.

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Bio:

Casey Moller is a Youth Worker and Community Engagement Officer with a background in psychology, youth work, and sexology. Casey collaborates with young people in community engagement, mental and sexual health education, and youth participation initiatives, focusing on amplifying youth voices and supporting inclusive, youth-led approaches.

Stream 8: Digital and Postdigital (2)

Panel: We have never been digital: Reflections on a postdigital society

Laura Glitsos, Jess Hardley and Andrew Hutcheon (Edith Cowan University)

The question of Australia's social media age restriction is arguably not one of what is happening now or in the future but what has already become ubiquitous and the responses to new realities that emerge from that ubiquity. We are now thoroughly what comes after the digital: the postdigital society. We frame the concept of the postdigital here as an ambient state, where are continually immersed in digital tools, from spreadsheets to parking apps, such that there is no effective 'outside' for many Australians. As per Cramer (2015), postdigital refers to, "a state in which the disruption brought upon by digital information technology has already occurred." Questions of citizenship and being in the postdigital society, for young and old alike, necessarily orbit issues of comprehension, relation, and reconsideration of how life is to be lived. This panel aims to approach postdigital living from varied but connected perspectives. We range from Glitsos' concept of the monstrous-digital and its account of the uncertainty of ontological foundations in digital space, to Hardley's postphenomenological account of being and moving as a citizen in the postdigital city, to Hutcheon's account of how the postdigital society obsolesces prior conceptions of good government. Critically, we ask what it means for us to theorise and research live issues, such as the social media age restriction legislation or Australia's national AI plan, now that the 'digital revolution' is over and we remain philosophically adrift. We aim to engage in dialogue on our core arguments and on how we should view the process of growing up in the "dark forests and cozy webs"—the landscape of technological predation, retreat and placemaking (Appleton, 2021)—of postdigital society.

Stream 8: Digital and Postdigital (2)

Bios:

Dr Laura Glitsos (she/her) has been lecturing in the field of media, communications, and cultural studies for over a decade. She was awarded her PhD from Curtin University and is now a Teaching and Research Academic at Edith Cowan University. Her most recent published works are, "Living in Scroll Land: Anxiety and the Experience of Slop and Doom," and, "The monstrous-digital: Data necropolitics, social media, and the assassination of Brian Thompson".

Jess Hardley (they/them) is a Re-search Fellow in the ARC Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child within the School of Arts and Humanities at Edith Cowan University. They hold a PhD in Media and Communication (RMIT University) and an Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's Degree in Women's and Gender Studies (Utrecht University & Central European University). They have been teaching and researching in the fields of digital cultures, mobile media, and gender studies for over a decade.

Andrew Hutcheon (he/his) is Lecturer in Communications at Edith Cowan University. His research looks broadly at the intersection of culture and technology, with a particular focus on how institutions respond to digitisation and how people form ad hoc communities and institutions of their own in digital spaces. His most recent publication is "Crises in Australian education, the push for educational technology and the medium-oriented perspective of Neil Postman" (2025).

Stream 8: Digital and Postdigital (2)

Digital Literacy and Sexual Citizenship: Supporting young people with disability in online spaces

Emily Louise Castell (Sexuality, Education, Counselling and Consultancy Agency-SECCA)

Young people with disability continue to face barriers to accessing the information needed to participate fully online. These challenges are particularly evident in relation to sexual citizenship, where limited access to evidence-based and clear information is linked to increased likelihood of harm, abuse, and exploitation, as well as reduced confidence in navigating online interactions. Emerging influences such as AI driven content, algorithms, and online subcultures (e.g. the Manosphere) add further complexity for young people with disability and their supports, and can shape beliefs about relationships, gender, and consent. Young people with disability report experiencing connection, learning, and relationship-building when provided with accessible, meaningful support that enables autonomy and informed decision-making. SECCA advocates that all people have the right to understand their sexual and relationship rights in ways that make sense to them, including in online spaces. This presentation positions sexuality and relationship education as a core part of digital literacy and sexual citizenship. Research shows that people with intellectual disability benefit from explicit teaching, repetition, and supported practice. Drawing on practice-based insights, this session will highlight key challenges and share practical, rights-based strategies that support dignity of risk and confident engagement in online spaces.

Stream 8: Digital and Postdigital (2)

Bio:

Emily Louise Castell (she/her) is a clinical psychologist who provides counselling to people with disability from a trauma-informed and neurodiversity-affirming perspective.

Emily is focused on engaging in education and research that supports the rights of people with disability to healthy relationships, positive sexuality, body autonomy, and affirmation of their identities.

Emily is the daughter of British immigrant parents and grew up on the lands of the Whadjuk Nyoongar people in Boorloo with her two siblings, one of whom has a disability. Emily has experience as a support worker and coordinator within disability services.

Emily completed a PhD on relationships and sexuality for people with disability, a Masters in Clinical Psychology, Bachelor Degree (hons) in Psychology, and Graduate Certificate in Human Rights.

Stream 9: Sexuality (2)

The missing voices in porn literacy education: How can we equip teens with greater protective levels of porn literacy when we don't even possess that knowledge ourselves?

Elle Thielke (Edith Cowan University)

In Australia there is increasing demand for effective porn literacy education (PLE) coming from across the political divide. Despite a growing body of research and programs for PLE, a comprehensive desktop and literature review for my PhD project, "Holistic prevention for problematic porn use: Developing a framework for porn literacy curriculum with young people", identified a significant gap: the exclusion of two key voices. Though these cohorts are central to public debate, they remain largely under-consulted, if not entirely overlooked, in the development of PLE programs.

Existing approaches frequently fail to consult young people as experts on their experiences and existing knowledge base, thereby failing to understand their needs. Similarly, despite being the foremost authority in pornography, rarely, if ever, have porn performers and producers been consulted on the development of educational resources or policies relating to pornography (European Sex Workers Rights Alliance, 2026).

In this presentation, I will discuss this current gap in PLE, why young people's voices are crucial for PLE development, and unpack the untapped potential that could be achieved by collaborating with sex workers. I argue that failing to consult with these cohorts is disadvantaging teens, limiting the richness and accuracy of education accessible to them.

Stream 9: Sexuality (2)

Bio:

As a self-proclaimed academic porn nerd, Elle Thielke is a PhD Candidate at Edith Cowen University and Sexologist, whose re-search focuses on pornography, young people, and problematic porn use. With a background in sex work and digital media, her work bridges research and lived experience to explore how pornography intersects with sexual development, behaviour, and wellbeing.

Stream 9: Sexuality (2)

Panel: Young People's Digital Rights: Accessing relationships, sexuality, and health information online.

Giselle Woodley (Edith Cowan University), Katrina Marson (University of Sydney), Leon Huxtable (Sexual Health Victoria), Elle Thielke (Edith Cowan University)

International and national human rights frameworks, including guidance from the World Health Organization, The Australian Human Rights Commission and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, affirm that young people have the right to seek, and engage with media to inform and express themselves in forms they consider meaningful and relevant to their lives. These principles sit in tension with legal restrictions and ethical complexities surrounding access to forms of digital content, especially content deemed 'age inappropriate'. Young people's digital lives are increasingly governed through practices of restriction and surveillance, including parental controls, internet filtering software, phone blocks, social media age bans, and the newly implemented industry codes continue to limit young people's access. These measures often rest on assumptions of vulnerability and immaturity that risk infantilising young people, overlooking their evolving capacities and lived realities.

Within this landscape, young people are not only digital and sexual citizens, but relational beings who are curious and sometimes have desires to express their emerging sexual selves. Digital technologies play a significant growing role in how young people learn about relationships, consent, identity, and intimacy, yet access to sexual information and modes of intimate communication are frequently framed as inherently harmful. This panel seeks to critically examine young people's digital and sexual rights in light of recent legislative and regulatory shifts, drawing on rights based frameworks to question how protection,

Stream 9: Sexuality (2)

participation, and autonomy are negotiated and balanced.

Particular attention is given to contested domains such as access to pornography, practices of intimate digital communication including sexting, the growing role of artificial intelligence (AI) in shaping sexual content and advice, and the regulation and algorithmic suppression of online sexual health information. This panel situates these issues within broader debates about digital and sexual citizenship, asking whose voices are marginalised or centred, and how harm and risk are defined and governed. Bringing together perspectives from academia, industry, legal scholarship, and lived experience, the panel aims to foster nuanced discussion about how young people's rights to information, expression, privacy, and sexual self determination can be meaningfully upheld in increasingly regulated digital environments.

Bios:

Dr Giselle Woodley is a sexologist and works as a Lecturer and Post-doctoral Research fellow at the School of Arts and Humanities at Edith Cowan University in Australia. Giselle explores issues pertaining to sexuality, sexual violence, pornography, sexuality education, intimate communications, AI, image-based abuse, digital censorship and young people.

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 Fellow-ship (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.

Stream 9: Sexuality (2)

As a self-proclaimed academic porn nerd, Elle is a PhD Candidate at Edith Cowen University and Sexologist, whose research focuses on pornography, young people, and problematic porn use. With a background in sex work and digital media, she brings a nuanced, real-world perspective to discussions about how pornography shapes sexual cultures, behaviours, and wellbeing.

Leon Huxtable is a Schools and Community Educator at Sexual Health Victoria. He has worked at Sexual Health Victoria since 2022, and was previously a secondary school teacher working in New South Wales and Victoria. His interests include education around sexual content online, and developing national standards for Comprehensive Sexuality Education in Australia.

Stream 10: Communication and Campaigns

Managing New Nicotine Products (Vapes and Nicotine Pouches) on Social Media

Kahlia McCausland and Jonine Jancey (Curtin University)

Background/Aim: Social media platforms are a key channel for promoting new nicotine products, despite platform policies prohibiting such content and the introduction of Australia's Public Health (Tobacco and Other Products) Act 2023, which imposes clear restrictions on advertising and sponsorship. This study examines how vapes and nicotine pouches continue to be promoted on Instagram and TikTok, industry professionals' perceptions of related harms and management strategies, and the visibility of this content following the Act's implementation.

Methods: Three complementary studies were conducted. Study 1 involved content analysis of Instagram and TikTok posts identified via influencer networks and hashtag-based searches. Study 2 comprised in-depth, semi-structured interviews with industry and policy professionals, analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. Study 3 examined vape and nicotine pouch content promoted after the introduction of the Act.

Findings: Most e-cigarette content on TikTok (98%) and Instagram (100%) portrayed products positively, with extensive linking to business pages and online retailers. Interviewed professionals identified both challenges and opportunities for managing harmful content. Despite legislative reform, promotional material for new nicotine products remains widespread.

Discussion: Self-regulation by social media platforms has been ineffective. Stronger monitoring, enforcement, and regulatory responses are needed to curb the digital promotion of vapes and nicotine pouches and protect young people's health and safety.

Stream 10: Communication and Campaigns

Off the phone and onto the footy field: The social media minimum age ‘wellbeing’ campaign and the surfacing of tired ‘Australian’ ideals.

Suzanne Sdarov (Curtin University)

In October 2025, the Australian government launched the campaign ‘For the good of their wellbeing’ to promote the Social Media Minimum Age Law which came into effect in December 2025. Indeed, much of the push for this legislation appeared to be driven by popular mainstream press and media who convincingly used the idea of ‘wellbeing’ and the protection of an idealised, ‘healthy’ childhood to support the ban. Six months on from the introduction of this legislation, questions remain about whose wellbeing was being prioritised, how it was measured, and how that looks.

Prime Minister Albanese’s hyperbolic declaration that he wanted to get children “off their phones and onto the footy and cricket field”, suggests that he had a certain type of ‘ideal’, able-bodied child in mind, and he went on to claim that friendships that exist in online spaces aren’t “true friends”. [1]

In interrogating these claims I will draw upon the data and findings from our report, *Young Australians Perspectives on the Social Media Minimum Age Legislation* [2] released late last year, led by colleagues at QUT. While our data and report aren’t representative of an entire population group, our sample included diverse participants with a wide range of experiences and views. One key take-away: “Social media is fun and supports important relationships and connections.” [1] “Social Age Limit Not to Be Feared but Lauded | Prime Minister of Australia,” November 26, 2024, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/social-age-limit-not-be-feared-lauded>.

[2] Kim Osman et al., *Young Australians’ Perspectives on the Social Media*

Stream 10: Communication and Campaigns

Minimum Age Legislation, Report (Digital Media Research Centre, 2025), Australia, <https://apo.org.au/node/332901>.

Bio:

Suzanne Srdarov (PhD) is a Research Fellow at the ARC Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child, Curtin University node, and has taught media and cultural studies across West Australian universities for the past decade. Her research within the centre focusses on Australian digital childhoods, specifically the challenges posed by generative AI, including companion AI tools, and the ways these are integrated into the lives of young people. She has recently conducted field research in Queensland, working with primary school-aged children to hear directly from them about generative AI and its place in their lives, and has also spoken to teens about the Australian social media delay laws. She believes that young people have a lot to say, and deserve to be heard, about these emerging issues that directly impact their future.

Stream 10: Communication and Campaigns

Genuine listening or political point scoring by a PM? Motivations and strategic communication processes behind Australia's U/16 social media ban

Catherine Archer (Edith Cowan University)

When the Australian Prime Minister, Anthony Albanese, announced in late 2024 the plan for the world's first social media ban aimed at children under 16, he did so with a bold statement: "Social media is doing social harm to our kids. I'm calling time on it."

This paper investigates the decision by the Government to implement the ban and its announcement, the ban's subsequent (short) societal debate, followed by passing into law, media coverage and promotion. I use stakeholder and framing theory to discuss the (limited) consultation process and reflect on the Government's motives for the ban and its related strategic communication strategy. I apply critical discourse analysis methodology, focusing specifically on the Prime Minister's Instagram page, and critique the Government's populist approach.

While the ban was publicly framed as a protective measure to enhance social cohesion and reduce online harm for children, this paper interrogates whether the policy genuinely engaged with all relevant stakeholders—particularly children—or whether it served as a symbolic act to reinforce governmental authority and potentially win votes.

This study highlights the need for more inclusive stakeholder frameworks in public strategic communication and engagement, including in policies affecting young people's digital lives.

Keywords:

Social media; stakeholder theory; strategic communication; children; social media; digital governance; politics

Stream 11: State of Play

The right to play, volunteer burden and digital entanglement

Andrew Hutcheon (Edith Cowan University)

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child recognises children's right to play, recreation, and cultural participation, implicitly linking leisure to the rights of liberal citizenship. Yet delivery of such activities depends heavily on volunteer labour, a group that is shrinking and increasingly overstretched. Declining youth participation in volunteer-driven leisure activities, such as sports and live music, reflects not just shifts in taste but structural changes in how recreational opportunities are provisioned. Scholars such as Neil Postman and Robert Putnam underscore the democratic importance of a wide range of community groups, where co-presence supports social connection and civic awareness. Decline in recreational opportunity is not only a welfare issue but a citizenship problem for the young people most affected. This presentation argues that poorly executed digital transitions are compounding the volunteer burden, further disadvantaging community groups seeking to engage youth. Volunteers pushed onto online platforms without adequate support face administrative demands with diminishing rewards, reducing opportunities at a key point of youth connection to community. Drawing on preliminary findings from a study of volunteer burden in recreational contexts, this paper scrutinises digital technology's role in declining volunteerism and its downstream consequences for young people's opportunities to participate in civic and community life.

Bio:

Andrew Hutcheon is Lecturer in Communications at Edith Cowan University. His research looks broadly at the intersection of culture and technology, with a particular focus on how institutions respond to digitisation and how people form ad hoc communities and institutions of their own in digital spaces. His most recent publication is "Crises in Australian education, the push for educational technology and the medium-oriented perspective of Neil Postman" (2025).

Stream 11: State of Play

The Teachers of Fascination: We listen because we want to, not because we have to

Lauri Parr, Christina Pollard (Curtin University)

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is often treated as evidence of a globally unified consensus on children's rights. Yet this consensus was achieved through strategic ambiguities and broadly interpretable principles that afforded states considerable discretion in implementation, with no legally binding sanctions for non-compliance. Despite this, rapid technological change is often imagined as an unforeseeable disruption to children's rights. The legal orientation of assessing compliance and demanding adherence dominates child advocacy, faster and louder to "keep up".

Whether effective or not, the language of combat obscures the fundamental point of humanity. We honour children because they have intrinsic value. We share the human condition of navigating a strange world through experience. Rapid change creates experiences of growing up which adults cannot know or imagine.

This presentation offers a moment to laugh at the idea that we listen to children primarily as obligation. Sharing moments of connection and curiosity from participatory creative research with young people, Public Health Advocacy Institute and the Act Belong Commit campaign, we pay homage to children's voices and visions. Stepping outside of the legal gaze, we can turn to children not as subjects of protection, but as teachers of fascination.

Bios:

Lauri Parr is a Forrest Research Foundation Creative Fellow, based at the Public Health Advocacy Institute. Her practice-based human rights research uses ethical photography, photovoice and storytelling – to explore, celebrate and share

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counter discourses – with underrepresented communities. With an extensive global portfolio in complex contexts across 14 countries in 5 continents, her work is shared strategically in galleries, public institutions, and the public to influence social change.

Professor Christina Pollard is a Public Health Professor who directs the Public Health Advocacy Institute and the population-wide Act Belong Commit Campaign. Her research spans dietetics, nutrition, health promotion and public health, and has a particular focus on vulnerable population groups. With 30 years of experience in government, she is highly committed to translating research to policy and practice

Stream 12: Impacts

Silenced Online: The Impact of Social Media Bans on LGBTIQ+ Youth Rights and Wellbeing

Chloe Clements (Youth Pride Network)

The Australian social media ban for under-16s disproportionately harms LGBTIQ+ young people, for whom online spaces are vital for connection, identity, and emotional support. Research shows 95.7% of queer young people rely on social media to access friends, with 82% reporting the ban would leave them feeling disconnected from community and networks. One teenager noted, “(the ban) has just made the internet more dangerous” reflecting widespread workarounds that undermine policy effectiveness.

Social media also supports mental health: 59% of queer youth find support online, and 74% of young trans Australians say it improves self-esteem. Yet, the ban restricts voice and autonomy, silencing perspectives on issues that affect them. As one teen observed, “Taking away the voices of teenagers... it kept me informed about the world.” Many young people have reported that the policy fails to address harmful ideologies like homophobia or transphobia, and increases isolation, especially for regional and marginalised communities.

This paper uses a hybrid approach, combining theoretical frameworks on minority stress, digital citizenship, and harm reduction with lived experiences and youth voice. It argues that digital governance must balance safety with rights, centring young people’s perspectives to preserve social media as a life-affirming tool, and ensuring policies empower rather than isolate the most vulnerable youth.

Stream 12: Impacts

Bio:

Chloe Clements is the Manager of the Youth Pride Network, a youth-led LGBTQIA+ advocacy organisation in Western Australia. With extensive experience in community engagement, policy advocacy, and youth empowerment, Chloe leads initiatives that amplify the voices of queer young people and advance their rights in education, health, housing, and digital spaces. She has a strong focus on centring lived experience in policy discussions and promoting safe, inclusive, and supportive environments for LGBTQIA+ youth across urban, regional, and remote communities. Chloe's work bridges theory and practice, combining research-informed strategies with direct engagement to ensure young people's perspectives shape policies that affect their wellbeing and social inclusion.

Stream 12: Impacts

Australia's Children's Online Privacy Code: Affording rights to protection and participation

Anna Bunn (Curtin University)

This paper will provide an overview of the draft Australian Children's Online Privacy Code currently under development by the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (OAIC). It will also outline the OAIC's code development process and consultation approach. The Children's Online Privacy Code aims to provide greater protection of children's privacy in the online environment. The code itself and the OAIC's consultation process reflect a child rights approach that stands in contrast to the government's approach to the social media ban. Nevertheless, this paper suggests that the Children's Online Privacy code (as currently drafted) needs to go further and that it should, among other things, require online services to ensure that their personal information practices are fair and reasonable. The paper also highlights some of the concerns children raised during the code consultation process, as included in the Children's Consultation Report. This report forms one part of the OAIC's 'Privacy for Kids' webpages, which are important resources for developing children's digital literacy in the context of information privacy.

