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Strengthening the field of pornography research

Findings, disagreements, and priorities from a research convening

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Executive summary

Pornography is among the most common online activities, and among the least systematically studied. Researchers lack the basic funding and coordination mechanisms that comparable fields take for granted. There are only a few shared instruments for measuring experiences with pornography, no standard unit of exposure, no professional home, no authoritative reference document, and no reliable means to inform policy with evidence. Meanwhile, pornography is changing faster than the research investigating it, as sexually explicit content migrates onto mainstream platforms and AI systems begin generating personalized sexual content and companionship on demand.

In June 2026, the American Institute for Boys and Men convened approximately 40 researchers and experts across roughly ten disciplines in Minneapolis to take stock of the field: the evidence base, the disagreements, and what it most urgently needs to build. This paper synthesizes those two days and concludes with a list of recommendations for funders, researchers, and research institutions to strengthen the field and provide better evidence to policymakers and the public.

Consensus on some claims. Participants agreed that the literature frequently documents correlations between pornography use and poorer wellbeing outcomes, while emphasizing that these associations do not establish causation. Conversations throughout the meeting reflected the desire to address the relative lack of causal evidence for harm while focusing on practical implications for policymakers, clinicians, and educators. Participants converged around several claims: pornography consumption is common, especially among youth; some users experience genuine distress and loss of control, but frequency is a poor proxy for that distress; and pornography literacy efforts are weak and uneven, with little evidence about their effectiveness.

Other claims are probable but inconclusive, as most research consists of self-report and cross-sectional data. A large territory remains genuinely

unknown—most notably the effects of use across the lifespan, the benefits of pornography, and the impact of AI-generated content.

Where researchers disagree. The meeting deliberately sought to surface disagreement. Researchers disagree about whether the evidence on pornography and sexual aggression supports a universal causal claim, a causal claim limited to certain people or contexts, or an association explained by other variables. They also disagree about whether problematic use is best understood as addiction, an impulse-control disorder, or moral incongruence; how pornography should be defined for research; and whether age-verification laws reduce harmful consumption or merely shift traffic to noncompliant platforms. Notably, these are specific questions a coordinated research agenda could resolve.

A fragile field. The barriers to producing better evidence and translating it into better policy are as much infrastructural as empirical. Research is weighted toward clinical and psychological questions about effects on individuals, while population-level, institutional, and policy-oriented approaches remain underrepresented. Measurement is fragmented; the reliance on self-reported data is a methodological vulnerability; the career environment is hostile to researchers; funding is scarce and often carries an agenda. The field also lacks a forum for developing a collective voice. In that vacuum, the loudest advocates often become the default interpreters of evidence for legislators, journalists, and the public.

What should be built. The convening produced a clear agenda anchored in two foundational priorities: shared measurement standards and an evidence base that combines self-reported survey data with observational data. The field also needs sustained funding and coordination to pursue longitudinal and developmental research, real-time evaluation of the policies and education programs already being deployed, and greater capacity to study pornography's benefits, heterogeneity, and the AI frontier. Advancing this agenda requires more coordination through a society for the study of pornography, a measurement standards committee, a living state-of-the-evidence professional reference, and closer collaboration with technology scholars to study AI as it rapidly evolves.

The case for funders. Modest, strategic funding could produce outsized returns in a field where independent funding is scarce. Several of the highest-value wins are concrete and near-term. Researchers can establish shared measurement standards, evaluate policy effects through natural experiments created by staggered state legislation, and build the infrastructure needed to translate evidence for policymakers and the public.

Pornography is widespread and evolving quickly, with potentially high stakes for young people's agency, relationship formation, and wellbeing. And yet, pornography's effects remain uncertain and contested. The field of pornography research deserves more investment, coordination, and validation to provide policymakers and the public with better evidence.

Why this field and why now

Pornography is changing faster than the research describing it. Sexually explicit material no longer lives only on dedicated adult sites. It moves through the same platforms young people use for everything else, surfacing on mainstream social apps in forms that evade moderation, on webcam and creator platforms that blend performance with parasocial intimacy, and, increasingly, through AI systems that can generate personalized sexual content and companionship on demand.

These changes are transforming pornography and how people encounter it. Yet many of the field's definitions and measures were designed for an earlier era: an open, search-driven web that predated algorithmic feeds and generative AI.

1.1 A common behavior, thinly understood. A synthesis of the recent literature shows that most adult men have accessed pornography at least once, and pooled estimates put weekly use among men near 45 percent, with markedly higher rates among younger men. Yet even basic patterns of use remain uncertain. The field needs more longitudinal data, evidence on use across the lifespan, representative samples within and outside the United States, and consistent measures that reflect current technology.

1.2 Public discourse not grounded in empirical findings. Public discussion of pornography often functions as a proxy for other ideological commitments: one side treats pornography chiefly as a moral crisis requiring prohibition, the other chiefly as a matter of privacy and sexual expression to be defended. This polarization has practical costs, as it hands the interpretation of research to whoever is loudest, and it leaves the people who most need guidance—parents, educators, clinicians, and the young people themselves—with little reliable information. A stronger and better-coordinated research field could improve public understanding and decision-making.

1.3 The stakes are converging on young men. Pornography intersects with a broader set of trends affecting young men, including declining rates of dating and relationship formation, rising social withdrawal, and a possible rise in rough sex behaviors during partnered sexual activity. An Institute for Family Studies analysis of General Social Survey data finds that the share of young adults aged 18–29 reporting no sex in the past year doubled from 12 percent in 2010 to 24 percent in 2024—a rapid increase that tracks the same period in which digital life reorganized around smartphones and always-available online content.

The analysis does not establish pornography as the cause of these trends. However, it underscores the need for more research to determine whether and how it may be a contributing factor. Pornography, AI companions, dating apps, and related technologies each offer immediate, low-friction ways to meet needs for arousal, pleasure, validation, and connection. These technologies may sometimes substitute for experiences through which people develop relationship skills. Whether such substitution occurs, whether it affects relationship formation, and which groups are most affected remain open empirical questions.

1.4 Why AIBM convened pornography researchers. In June 2026, AIBM brought together researchers and experts for two days of structured discussion in Minneapolis. Although participants represented a range of fields, the conversations reflected pornography research’s historical concentration in clinical and psychological questions about individual exposure, distress, and treatment. These questions remain essential, but the convening also revealed the need for more population-level and policy-oriented research—work capable of analyzing aggregate patterns, evaluating changes in platforms and regulation, and identifying effects across communities.

The convening’s goals were deliberately field-level rather than topical: to help researchers from across disciplines who rarely share a room coordinate and find collaborators, surface the gaps and disagreements in the current evidence base honestly, sketch a shared research agenda, and demonstrate to funders where sustained investment could support progress.

This paper synthesizes those conversations for two audiences: funders considering where and whether to invest, and researchers considering how they might contribute. The sections that follow describe what the evidence currently supports, what remains contested, and what should be built.

What we know and with what confidence

Across nearly six decades and more than a dozen disciplines, the field has produced associations of varying strength based on measures of varying quality, even as the behaviors under study continue to change. Mindful of the distinction between associations and causal claims, participants converged around a few well-established conclusions, some probable inferences, several genuinely contested debates, and a large territory that remains unknown.

2.1 Prevalence and use. The opening panel agreed that pornography use is common: a majority of sexually active adult men consume it; women report using it less frequently; and some couples watch it together. Pornography use is age-patterned: it is generally more frequent among younger men and tends to decline across adulthood. Beyond that, prevalence estimates vary depending on how use is measured. More precise estimates—how much is consumed, how often, and how many people are heavy users—depend heavily on how pornography and use are defined, the period respondents are asked to recall, and the methods used to collect data. The field can confidently state that use is common, typically solitary, and age-patterned; it cannot yet provide rigorous estimates for more granular questions. Relatedly, pornography consumption is typically—but not always—accompanied by masturbation or partnered sexual activity, with uncertain implications for motives and compulsive use.

2.2 Self-report and its limits. Self-report data are indispensable for studying beliefs, distress, motivations, and perceived effects. They are less reliable as the sole measure of behavior—such as frequency, duration, or sequence of use—because responses can be affected by recall, stigma, identity, mood, and differing definitions of pornography. Without comparison data, researchers cannot readily estimate the direction or magnitude of these discrepancies.

Self-report and behavioral methods should therefore be treated as complementary rather than competing approaches. Observational data can help researchers compare reported and logged behavior at the individual level. Separately, appropriately governed aggregate data from platforms, internet-service providers, and device panels can illuminate population patterns and policy effects that individual studies cannot observe. Each method has distinct limitations, including selection bias, privacy, data security, and ethics concerns.

2.3 Problematic use. Participants broadly agreed that some users experience genuine distress, impaired control, and disruption to daily functioning—and that frequency alone is a poor indicator of these problems. Frequent use can occur without distress or impairment, while relatively infrequent use can be experienced as troubling, depending on a person’s circumstances, beliefs, sense of control, and perceived consequences.

Current measurement instruments complicate the picture because they may combine at least three distinct presentations: dysregulated use, moral incongruence, and the attribution of sexual or performance difficulties to pornography. The same high score can therefore reflect different sources of distress requiring different clinical responses. Until instruments distinguish among these presentations more reliably, estimates of “problematic pornography use” should be interpreted cautiously.

Participants also identified major gaps in treatment access and evidence. Compulsive sexual behavior disorder is classified as an impulse-control disorder in the eleventh revision of the International Classification of Diseases, but the absence of a corresponding US reimbursement code can restrict access to specialized care and make treatment research more difficult. Clinicians must rely on broader diagnostic categories, potentially complicating reimbursement and claims-based research. The field also has very few randomized treatment trials and limited agreement on which interventions should be standardized and evaluated.

Finally, measures must account for population-specific circumstances. An item such as “hiding your pornography use from others,” for example, may indicate problematic secrecy in one context but an ordinary safety strategy for an LGBTQ person living with an unsupportive family. Without that context, an instrument risks misclassifying protective behavior as a symptom.

2.4 Aggression and consent. Panelists endorsed a narrow claim: pornography use is associated with sexual aggression, although the associations are generally small and appear stronger for aggressive or violent content and among users with preexisting risk factors. They did not agree that the evidence supports a general causal claim. The absence of explicit consent in much mainstream content and possible effects on attitudes remain important research questions, but existing study designs make causal inference difficult. The competing interpretations are described in Section 3.

2.5 Youth, relationships, and development. Among adults, associations between pornography use and relationship or sexual quality vary by gender, whether use is individual or shared, and other contextual factors; studies report both negative and positive outcomes. Adolescent-specific evidence is much thinner and remains largely cross-sectional.

The convening’s most generative reframe was to stop treating exposure as the whole question and ask instead which opportunities to develop relationship competencies may be displaced by frictionless digital platforms. Through this lens, pornography, AI companions, dating apps, and social media may meet real needs for validation, arousal, and emotional payoff while bypassing the relational friction—rejection, awkwardness, negotiation, consent—through which young people build the competencies that relationships require. This developmental-opportunity hypothesis draws on evolutionary accounts of mismatch in modern mating environments and on developmental research treating intimacy and romantic competence as skills built across adolescence and young adulthood. These literatures provide the

conceptual foundation for the hypothesis; they do not yet establish that digital platforms displace those competencies. Still, it is a promising framework for organizing the longitudinal work described in the recommendations.

2.6 Education and literacy. Sex education in the United States is inconsistent. As of September 2025, 41 states and the District of Columbia required sex education, HIV education, or both, but only 26 required the instruction to be medically accurate; these requirements do not ensure a comprehensive curriculum. Even where sex education is provided, pornography and sexually explicit media are often addressed inconsistently or not at all.

Families also face substantial barriers to discussing these subjects. Parents report embarrassment, insufficient knowledge, and the belief that their children are too young, while adolescents report embarrassment and the belief that they already know more than their parents. When both schools and families leave these questions unanswered, pornography can become a de facto source of sexual information.

Research on general sexuality education finds that abstinence-only programs do not reliably improve sexual-health outcomes. Panelists also cautioned against fear-based approaches, although pornography-specific education programs have been evaluated too rarely to determine which approaches work best. Several favored nonjudgmental approaches centered on harm reduction, critical reflection, and alignment with personal values. Yet researchers know little about which programs work, for whom, at what ages, or against which outcomes.

Several panelists cautioned that the term “porn literacy” is easily misread as teaching young people how to consume pornography, and preferred framings such as education about sexually explicit media or relationship education that addresses sexual learning via media consumption more broadly.

2.7 Policy instruments. Age-verification laws offer one of the clearest

opportunities for policy-relevant research. Because states adopted these laws at different times, researchers can use quasi-experimental methods to compare changes in behavior across jurisdictions.

A 2026 NBER [working paper](#) using individual-level passive browsing data estimated that state age-verification laws reduced total measured time on adult websites by roughly 10 percent, with the reduction partly offset by three mechanisms: VPN-based circumvention, substitution to noncompliant sites, and the large share of baseline traffic already going to sites that never complied.

Crucially, the same work could not speak directly to effects on minors—the population the laws target—because the data cover adults only. The substitution finding matters beyond measurement, as traffic pushed from compliant mainstream sites toward less-regulated ones may worsen outcomes with respect to age verification, removal of child sexual abuse material, and nonconsensual-content takedown. The paper illustrates how empirical research can inform a live policy question.

2.8 Benefits and heterogeneity. The literature is asymmetric in practice: potential harms have received far more attention than potential benefits. Self-reported benefits—sexual learning; disclosure to partners; identity affirmation, especially for queer users and people with stigmatized interests; and pleasure—are commonly reported but almost never examined systematically.

The relative scarcity of evidence about benefits may reflect researchers' choice of questions as much as an actual absence of benefits. Potential benefits and harms are also not mutually exclusive: experiences may differ according to age, gender, sexual orientation, relationship context, values, content, and purpose of use. The field should investigate benefits and harms with comparable care while seeking to understand heterogeneity.

What researchers disagree about

Surfacing disagreement was a stated goal of the convening. Researchers engaged deeply and respectfully with these disagreements, revealing a field willing to name its own fault lines. Four disagreements were live in the room.

3.1 What pornography is. The definitional dispute pits structural definitions, tied to content depicting nudity or sexual behavior, against functional ones, tied to whatever a given person uses for sexual arousal, which may include material that falls outside traditional definitions of pornography. A breakout session on measurement standardization ultimately converged on the view that the right definition depends on the research question. Structural definitions suit content-effects questions (scripts, aggression, condom depiction, choking); functional definitions suit displacement and substitution questions (the roles pornography may serve in a person's life instead of other behaviors or contact with a partner).

3.2 Addiction versus impulse control versus moral incongruence. Participants held differing views about addiction language, the impulse-control framing, and whether any diagnostic label is yet warranted. The same high score on a problematic-use measure can reflect compulsive behavior, moral conflict, sexual-dysfunction anxiety, or partner conflict—and these call for different clinical responses. At the same time, there was practical consensus that people are demonstrably suffering and that treatment and research should proceed while researchers continue refining the relevant diagnostic categories and measures.

3.3 Causality in the aggression literature. This is the sharpest dispute in the field, and it is a dispute about inference, not about the existence of the associations. One position holds that converging evidence is sufficient to support a conditional causal conclusion: violent or nonconsensual content adds “fuel to the fire” for men who already carry relevant risk factors. The other position does not deny the associations; it argues that the evidence

for the mechanism—the idea that pornography instills “sexual scripts”—rests largely on cross-sectional data vulnerable to third-variable explanations, and that “scripts” is used loosely to mean several different things, including specific learned behaviors, normalized myths, and shifted partner expectations.

The debate centered on mechanism and research design: what ethically feasible study could persuade skeptics, given that randomized, long-term exposure to violent content cannot be approved? The existing natural-experiment evidence is contested: participants noted that the classic studies of pornography legalization and reported sexual aggression are confounded by concurrent legal changes, shifting definitions, and inference problems, so they do not settle the question in either direction.

3.4 Age verification and the regulatory approach. There was disagreement over whether website-level age verification is genuinely protective or merely a game of “whack-a-mole” that burdens compliant platforms while driving users to noncompliant alternatives.

What's structurally broken

The preceding sections describe what the field knows and disputes. This section describes the obstacles to better evidence: the problems are not only empirical but infrastructural. Each challenge described below could be addressed with more coordination and investment.

4.1 Measurement fragmentation. The field has no shared anchor measures, no standard exposure unit, and no agreed resolution of when to define pornography by content versus function. A participant in the compulsive-use session noted that pornography has no equivalent of alcohol's "standard drink." Substances have a defined unit—roughly fourteen grams of alcohol, five milligrams of THC—but there is no comparable unit for pornography: viewing a social-media image for three seconds and watching pornography for several hours both count as "use."

Exposure is only one measurement problem. Studies also need consistent ways to capture the function and context of use—for example, whether pornography is used as a sexual outlet, for entertainment, for learning or exploration, or with a partner. Masturbation may be one relevant contextual variable, but the field lacks both an agreed taxonomy of purposes and standard measures for capturing them. As a result, studies using the same general label may be measuring different behaviors. Measurement also relies too heavily on a single method; the field needs complementary approaches that combine self-reported and observational data.

4.2 A hostile career environment. Studying pornography can carry professional costs inside and outside the academy, including stigma, tenure risk, external harassment, and misquotation. Few researchers can build a career on pornography research alone. If senior scholars withdraw from exhaustion, junior scholars are warned off by advisors, and scholars typically operate in isolation within their own institution, the evidence base stays thin by attrition. Participants asked that this synthesis make those risks visible and emphasize the importance of supporting the next

generation.

4.3 Funding scarcity and risks of bias. Federal funding for pornography research is extremely limited, particularly for projects focused directly on the subject. Researchers often pursue relevant questions through grants in adjacent areas such as HIV prevention or sexual health. Other available funding may come from advocacy organizations, the adult industry, or treatment providers, creating actual or perceived concerns about research independence. The field needs credible funding structures that protect researchers' autonomy regardless of the funder's perspective or interests.

4.4 No collective voice. The field has no professional home, no authoritative state-of-the-evidence document, no trusted-reporter network, and no policy-translation layer. In that vacuum, journalists and legislators default to the loudest available source. The public increasingly encounters claims about pornography from podcasts and influencers rather than researchers and scholarly publications. Without stronger mechanisms for synthesis and communication, better research may still fail to reach the people shaping policy and public understanding.

A research agenda

The convening coalesced around a set of research priorities that recurred across most sessions and both days of breakouts. They are presented here in rough priority order, with the first two priorities as prerequisites for progress on the rest.

5.1 Fix measurement first. Existing survey instruments represent substantial work and include items that have been carefully developed and validated. The next step is not to discard those instruments, but to identify a shared core that reflects current technology, clarify which units of exposure and measures of function are appropriate for different research questions, and secure broad adoption across the field.

5.2 Use complementary behavioral and aggregate data. Researchers should examine where self-reported behavior converges with or diverges from observational data. They should also make greater use of aggregate platform, ISP, and device-panel data to study population patterns, technological change, and policy effects. Observational data would contribute to a more diverse evidence base capable of addressing questions at both individual and societal scales.

5.3 Disentangle the driving factors of problematic use. Problematic-use research is held back by instruments that conflate distinct factors into a single score. Empirical research and clinical work should distinguish between dysregulated use, moral incongruence, sexual-dysfunction attribution, and other sources of distress or impairment. Clearer distinctions would produce more precise prevalence estimates, improve understanding of the underlying mechanisms, and help clinicians match treatment to the actual source of distress or impairment.

5.4 Test treatments. The field has essentially no randomized controlled trials for people experiencing distress around pornography use. Clinicians are working from a limited evidence base and patients are paying out of pocket for care of unknown efficacy. Treatment-outcome research,

including randomized trials, should evaluate clearly defined interventions and examine their effectiveness across the distinct presentations of problematic use identified in 5.3.

5.5 Study development longitudinally. More longitudinal research is needed to understand when and how children and adolescents encounter pornography and how those experiences relate to the development of relationship skills. Conducting this work is difficult because research involving minors and sexuality must navigate substantial requirements for ethics review, school approval, and parental consent. Developmental, longitudinal, and multi-site research can clarify, for example, whether young people with weaker relationship skills are more drawn to frictionless outlets, whether the outlets erode those skills, or whether both patterns occur among different groups.

5.6 Explore associations with the decline in dating. Associations with sexual and relationship outcomes are commonly found, but they are heterogeneous and may differ by gender, patterns of use, content, and relationship context. Research should test competing mechanisms, including whether some content shapes expectations and whether pornography substitutes for partnered intimacy. This work should examine normative, non-problematic use as well as use experienced as distressing and explore whether these dynamics relate to declining dating and sexual activity.

5.7 Evaluate policy and education as they happen. Age-verification laws, takedown statutes, and literacy programs are being enacted and deployed now, mostly without evaluation. Researchers ought to design studies around these interventions—measuring compliance, circumvention, substitution, privacy costs, and actual effects on the populations targeted—and also evaluate literacy and education programs at scale rather than assuming they work. Researchers could produce a state-by-state assessment of whether and how sex-education standards address pornography or sexually explicit media, paired with an agenda for evaluating the approaches currently in use.

5.8 Study benefits, heterogeneity, and the technological frontier. The field should examine neutral and positive experiences—such as sexual learning, identity exploration, pleasure, and intimacy—with the same rigor as potential harms. Research should also take heterogeneity seriously: effects and meanings may differ by age, gender, sexual orientation, relationship status, values, content, and purpose of use.

5.9 Keep pace with technological change. The field needs the capacity to study AI-generated sexual content and companionship as they develop. Questions involving consent, personalization, parasocial attachment, emotional substitution, and human intimacy require collaboration with researchers in technology, human-computer interaction, and social science.

Infrastructure the field needs

Pornography research lacks the basic infrastructure and sustained investment other fields take for granted: no shared measures, no professional home, no authoritative reference document, no protected pipeline for new researchers, and no reliable channel to policymakers. The following recommendations emerged throughout the meeting's panels and breakout sessions.

6.1 A professional home. The convening surfaced strong interest in a durable structure that can convene researchers regularly, support collaboration, and develop a collective identity. This could begin as a preconference attached to an existing scholarly meeting, develop into a working consortium, and eventually become an independent professional society.

Such a body should deliberately support early-career researchers through mentorship, funding, professional recognition, and opportunities in science communication. It should also broaden the field's disciplinary base by involving researchers from economics, sociology, public policy, data science, and technology alongside those working in clinical and psychological fields. Finally, it would need clear rules governing whether and how the adult industry participates. Adjacent fields such as gambling research offer models in which researchers, regulators, and industry representatives share convening space under explicit safeguards for research independence.

6.2 A measurement standards committee. A small working committee should be charged with delivering shared measurement standards. Its composition should include a psychometrician, someone connected to a major survey vehicle such as the General Social Survey, experienced pornography researchers, and experts with access to substantive behavioral and aggregate data. The committee should compile a repository of recommended items and definitions, a validation agenda for those measures, and guidance about which measures are best suited to different

research questions. Its success would ultimately depend on securing broad commitment from researchers to adopt a common core while retaining flexibility for specialized studies.

6.3 Researcher access to industry data. Pornography platforms collect behavioral information at a scale and granularity no academic study can approach—what is viewed, for how long, by whom, in what sequence, and how consumption shifts when laws or platform designs change.

A professional society could negotiate data-sharing frameworks that let researchers study behavioral data without platforms handing over raw records or researchers vouching for platforms. Similar arrangements for social media and gambling researchers show both the promise and the challenges, including agreements that give data holders veto power over inconvenient findings. Built carefully, with independence protected by design, industry data access could help address the field’s dependence on self-reported data.

6.4 A living state-of-the-evidence reference. A professional association could maintain an accessible, regularly updated reference that distinguishes what the evidence supports, what remains contested, and what is still unknown. This resource would expand on what the present white paper attempts in a more limited form.

A trusted reference would give journalists, legislators, educators, and practitioners an alternative to the most visible or dramatic claims. It would also give researchers a shared account of the evidence and its uncertainties—one that no single advocacy perspective controls.

6.5 Capacity for the AI frontier. The field must be equipped to study what is coming, not only what has been experienced. AI-generated pornography and AI companionship shift the core research questions—from consuming produced media to generating personalized sexual representations and relationships.

AI pornography raises new problems of consent, since realistic explicit imagery can be produced from ordinary photos; enforceability, since local,

downloadable models evade platform controls; and parasocial attachment, scams, and emotional substitution. The convening surfaced early qualitative observations that these technologies are used differently by different people and may serve as creative outlets for some users and as a means of avoidance for others, but it did not resolve whether such use is developmentally helpful, harmful, or both. The field needs interdisciplinary reach to study this now, before the evidence gap widens further with generative AI.

The case for funders

Pornography research addresses a widespread and rapidly changing set of behaviors with potentially important consequences for individuals, relationships, and public policy. Yet the field remains severely under-resourced. This combination of social relevance, limited investment, and clearly defined needs creates an unusual opportunity for funders to accelerate progress.

7.1 Why the field is underfunded, and why that is the opportunity.

Federal funding for pornography research is extremely limited. Meanwhile, policy activity around minors' access to pornography has accelerated, and polling finds broad, bipartisan support for age-verification requirements. Independent, credible money is scarce enough that a relatively small commitment can strengthen an entire field's direction, standards, and talent pipeline.

7.2 Concrete impact, near-term returns. The field has unusually concrete, near-term deliverables. A working committee could develop shared measurement standards and a plan for evaluating them. Existing studies demonstrate the feasibility of using behavioral data to complement survey data. Staggered adoption of state policies creates natural experiments that researchers can evaluate as they unfold. A living state-of-the-evidence reference would immediately improve how journalists, policymakers, and practitioners interpret the research. These investments would create infrastructure supporting a range of studies rather than funding only a single project or intervention.

7.3 Validating empirical researchers with credible funding. Academia penalizes pornography research—through stigma inside the academy, harassment outside it, tenure risk, and the plain fact that no career can be built on pornography research alone. Funders can lend credibility to the field by investing in fellowships, early-career positions, and cost-effective convenings.

Appendix: Methods and sources

This paper synthesizes discussion from the Porn Research & Policy Meeting held in Minneapolis on June 11–12, 2026, convened by the American Institute for Boys and Men. The convening brought together researchers and experts spanning roughly ten disciplines for structured panels, moderated discussions, and breakout groups across two days.

Scope. This is a synthesis of a field-building convening, not a systematic review of the pornography research literature. It presents participants’ assessment of the field’s evidence, disagreements, research priorities, and infrastructure needs. It is intended for researchers considering whether and how to coordinate and for funders considering where investment could advance the field.

Non-attribution. The synthesis follows the convening’s ground rule that individual contributions are not attributed to named participants. Views expressed during sessions are described as those of “panelists” or “participants.” Where specific claims are drawn from an individual’s published work, the paper cites that literature rather than attributing remarks made during the meeting. This rule was communicated to participants at the convening, and a draft of this paper was circulated to attendees, as well as to several experts unable to attend the convening, for review before publication. Circulation for review does not imply that every reviewer endorses every conclusion.

Sources. The synthesis draws on three bodies of material: session recordings from the convening; AIBM’s landscape scan of pornography use by men in the United States, which mapped the existing literature; and, for specific empirical claims, the published research those claims rest on. Recording coverage was uneven across sessions; sections with incomplete coverage reflect only the discussion captured in the available recordings. Where a figure or finding is attributed to published work, it has been verified against the source.

