HATRED AND HARM: THE INFLUENCE OF DIGITAL PIMPS AND THE

MISEDUCATION OF THE HYPER-MASCULINE MAN

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research project is to measure the effects of a correlation between exposure to violent, hardcore sexually-explicit Internet materials, or SEIM (also known as pornography), and behaviors and attitudes that demean, degrade, subjugate, and abuse women and girls resulting in systemic gender inequality. Research is based on peer-reviewed journal articles, subject-matter publications, crime statistics, personal interviews with experts, and meta-analyses of previous research on related topics. The research has demonstrated a very strong correlation between exposure to SEIM and hyper-masculine attitudes and behaviors of gender-inequality toward women, beginning at one end of the spectrum with verbal micro-aggressions or misogynistic cultural biases and ending at the other end with sexual assault or sexual abuse, depending on external factors of the user including environmental, social, family of origin, and psychological. The conclusion is that any exposure to SEIM relates to negative attitudes and behaviors toward women, but that specific types of individuals are more effected by such exposure. All exposure to these materials should be limited to avoid continued gender-inequality in our society.

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INTRODUCTION

"Stories socialize us into roles of gender, age, class, vocation, and life-style, and offer models of conformity or targets for rebellion. They weave the seamless web of the cultural environment that cultivates most of what we think, what we do, and how we conduct our affairs." (Gerbner, 1999)

The effects of media on culture cannot be overstated. The power and influence of mass media has developed exponentially in the recent decade due to the combination of high-speed Internet connectivity with the prevalence of personal handheld devices. In 2021, most of the developed world is POPC: Permanently Online Permanently Connected. This climate has initiated a substantial change to our understanding of the effects of media and to the way in which such effects can be researched and studied. One of the dominant issues regarding contemporary media effects research is that direct causation between the influence of and the resulting attitudes or behaviors is virtually impossible to prove. In the past century, media use (radio, newspapers, books, magazines, and television) was one directional: from producer to consumer. That is no longer the case. Does art imitate life, or does life imitate art? Media comes to the user through multiple simultaneous streams and the consumer of media can respond directly to other consumers and the creators themselves; in some cases, that consumer is also the creator of his or her own shared media content. The Internet has transformed the ordinary individual media user into a more active participant in the process of media effects through the personalization and customization of his selective media consumption. This phenomenon, when combined with other non-media sources of cultural influence, results in a cross-sectional web of cultural influences – from both media and non-media sources – that has the unprecedented power to alter the attitudes and behaviors of the individual and society on a massive scale. Deviant behavior, up to and including that which is criminal, has become more mainstream thanks to the influences of digital media.

One of the most controversial media issues over the past half-century has been the influence of depictions of violence.[1] The more commonplace these images are, the more they are normalized in the minds of the consumers. Violent media comes in many forms, one of which is violence against women, or gender-based violence. There is no larger media market that showcases this type of violence, distributes it to a mass media audience, and provides men with how-to instructions on a variety of deviant behaviors to include sexual assault and the sexual abuse of minors than sexually-explicit Internet material, or SEIM, also known as hardcore pornography.[2] Younger and younger children are freely provided with unfettered and constant access to the entire Internet by parents, care-givers, and educators; the media images that are consumed on handheld devices normalize behaviors and attitudes that, in prior generations, were considered unacceptable by mainstream community standards, particularly when youthful users stumble upon material meant for an adult audience. Male power and aggression, among other things, is encouraged and reinforced through violent media, such as hardcore pornography (Hlavka, 2014). Boys are being conditioned to believe that women and girls deserve to be sexually exploited, and more so that they want to be and expect to be treated that way.[3] The influence of SEIM is one of the major factors in the presence and persistence of violence toward women in our nation and our world.

There are evidence-based links between pornography production (and consumption) and prostitution, human trafficking, child abuse, child sexual abuse, domestic violence, and sexual harassment and misconduct (Bonino et al., 2006; Burton et al., 2010; DeKeseredy, 2015; Diliberti et al., 2019; Seto & Lalumiere, 2010). Pornography is one aspect of a sex industry deeply imbedded in a misogynistic culture of gender-based discrimination; it is the documentation of sexual acts or, to put it bluntly, digitally-

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[1] There are numerous studies correlating violent behavior with exposure to violence in movies, video games, and television.
[2] At least two-thirds of youthful Internet users reported unwanted exposure to SEIM, a characterization that could be viewed as normative, particularly among teenage boys (Wolak, 2007).
[3] Girls overwhelmingly describe male sexually aggressive behavior as normal stuff that guys do. They tolerate when things just happen, for instance being harassed and assaulted at parties, in school, or in other public places (Hlavka, 2014). Heather Hlavka describes this social conditioning, which impacts both sexes, as a Wall of Patriarchy.

documented prostitution (Whisnant, 2004). SEIM has hyper-sexualized western culture, normalizing commercial sex as an acceptable recreational activity and the notion that women can be used and discarded. Many young girls develop negative body images, self-objectify, and are at an increased risk to become sexual victims. Many young men and adolescent boys subscribe to pornography-reinforced attitudes that defend rape, support sexual harassment, and display aggressive behavior toward others. This pattern of masculinity, or warrior manhood - which claims that sexual violence is natural, arises from male gendering and violates the core precepts of democracy (Herbert, 2002). An entire generation is being raised on the gender-based violent images that are viewed every hour of every day on countless Internet-accessible devices across the country. Offline pornography has been regulated and children are generally limited in the risk of exposure, so no convincing argument exists as to why the digital version of the same materials cannot be limited in the online market too. Sexualized imagery of women and girls has normalized the idea that objectification is a legitimate form of entertainment (Coy, 2007). The Internet has intensified the forms of pornography available to the general public, including impressionable minors, compared to what images the media portrayed to previous generations of consumers.

Pornography, to be clear, is not a moral issue or a sex issue – it is a political issue about media representations of violence against women that discriminates on the basis of gender. The entire sex industry is based on perpetuating the myth of masculine domination through abuse. It is not necessary for all men to victimize all women in some way in order for all women to live in fear of gender-based violence (Belknap, 1996). Living in a world that normalizes these attitudes and acts of aggression is enough to encourage fear in all women and girls. Women live in a permanent state of symbolic dependence, expected to live up to males' ideals of femininity that are not their own (Bourdieu, 2001). While the negative impacts of violence in media are great enough across the entire population, these effects are exponentially increased in younger populations. Negative gender attitudes among boys, as well as reported acts of sexual violence, harassment, and coercion of girls in their peer groups (including digitally),

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overlapped with regular use of online pornography (Drouin et al., 2015; Herbert, 2002; Lavoie et al., 2000; Stanley et al., 2016). The media images that depict violence against women or negative gender-based attitudes cannot be held solely accountable for the attitudes and behaviors of toxic masculinity in the same way that exposure to violent images does not completely cause the consumer to act out violently in their personal lives. A causal link cannot be established as there are too many variables to prove such a direct relationship. Instead, the negative effects of exposure to violent media, combined with other non-media factors such as psychology, cultural background, the influence of peer groups, and family of origin can help determine that a strong correlation exists between early exposure to such depictions and the resulting negative attitudes and behaviors that the users of such material adopt as their own (Donnerstein, 1984). The real problem is the demand for these materials and the culture that demands them; the only long-lasting solution is to begin addressing the type of hyper-masculinity that teaches young boys and men to be aggressive at the expense of the rest of their emotions (MacLeod et al., 2008).

The need to address exposure to such media imagery exists because of the free society that we purport to revere and seek to preserve. No society can truly be free when an entire group within that society is victimized through the degradation, subjugation, dehumanization, oppression, and abuse of another group. In this case, women and children are being shown to deserve and desire physical, emotional, and sexual abuse at the hands of men in almost every imaginable situation. Proponents of pornography have for decades shifted the discussion toward censorship and freedom of speech. However, advocates for women's rights argue that the debate against hardcore pornography is not about censorship, but about gender inequality, sex discrimination, and violence against women (MacKinnon, 2005). A resurgence of the culture of toxic masculinity has been the result of the advances in the freedoms of women and minority groups and the threat of straight, white men losing their power and dominance over society. When the freedom of expression of the majority group results in the silencing of a minority group, true democracy and liberty can never be achieved. The debasing images present in the digital

media of online hardcore pornography is both a product of gender inequality and the result of misogynistic

aggression[4] and anger toward women (MacKinnon, 2005). Pornography is not a victimless crime as many

users wrongly believe;[5] there are many victims, including the users themselves. SEIM is prostitution,

human trafficking, and child sexual abuse all rolled into one (NCOSE, 2017). The presence of these violent

media images online needs to be addressed so that the continued reinforcement of gender inequality and

the cycle of violence against women can be stopped. The United States should encourage boys and young

men to treat women and girls as their equals and not as sexual objects deserving and desiring sexually

assaultive and harassing treatment.

For the purposes of this article, the term *pornography*, or sexually-explicit Internet material,

shall be defined as:

> *Graphic sexually-explicit media that depicts subordinated women and children, by one or*
> *more men, and may include degradation and dehumanization of said women and children,*
> *as well as their enjoyment of pain, humiliation, rape, incest, and/or assault (*paraphrased
> and summarized from Dworkin & MacKinnon, 1983*)*.

The article will also solely deal with heterosexual pornography as the topic related to gender-

based violence against women and hyper-masculine domination, so homosexual pornography does not

fall under the scope of this definition. The purpose of this article is to present information from prior

research in the efforts to correlate a connection between early childhood exposure to hardcore violent

media images and the resulting delinquent or criminal behavior as well as any negative attitudes regarding

traditional gender roles, rape-myths, victim-blaming, domestic violence, and the hyper-sexualizing of

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[4] Cultural traditions illustrate that American masculinity was born out of the need for combat in the past and now in the present, has become endemic to males from childhood through fatherhood; this hyper-masculine tradition can be found in the military, football teams, and fraternity houses (Herbert, 2002). The bonding that often occurs in these all-male organizations and clubs is fueled by pornography that victimizes women as expendable pawns in the male game for status (Sanday, 2007).

[5] MacKinnon further asserts other key points including pornography combines sex and violence into the same thing, pornography creates a demand for prostitution, and pornography is trafficking at its core. "A prostitute is just being more honest about what she's doing. A pornography model can fool herself... We called what we were doing 'modeling' or 'acting'. Pornography models have the illusion that they're not hooking, but it's all a form of rape because women involved in it don't know how to get out," (Lederer, 1980).

women and children; subsequently, the article will provide discussion for further research and draw conclusions for potential policy-based solutions to the culture of toxic masculinity[6] as influenced by SEIM.

This article seeks to illustrate a substantial increase in SEIM since 2002's introduction of high-speed broadband connectivity, determine the amount and frequency of exposure to violent pornography amongst adolescent Internet users, explore the possible connections between pornography, prostitution, and human trafficking, and finally prove a correlation between an increase in the production of and exposure to such explicit content and the subsequent negative attitudes about women (from both men and women themselves) and unacceptable behaviors such as sexual assault, objectification of women, sexualization of children, domestic violence, sexual harassment, and belief in rape-myths.

LITERATURE REVIEW

<u>Media Effects</u>

Mass media has altered perceptions and definitions of communication and communication studies as well as theories and research methodologies by scholars in the field. No media source in human history has had the power to reach billions of people in a second like high-speed, broadband Internet does every single day. It is important to study the effects of media sources on individuals and groups alike because of the sheer power of that influence. Media effects are the changes in the consumer that result from his or her continued media use; these changes include deliberate and non-deliberate, short and long term, and cover attitudes, behaviors, emotions, and cognitive connections (Valkenburg et al., 2016). Since

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[6] Many males in the modern age cannot fathom what it must be like for females to have to seek the protection of their brothers, fathers, and husbands to avoid being sexually harassed or assaulted. They will not be able to comprehend the constant state of fear in which women exist to the point that they cannot freely move about American cities at night (Herbert, 2002). The culture of patriarchy has deep roots, some of which stem from the 18th century concepts of Coverture and Romantic Paternalism (commented on by Judge William Blackstone) that provided men with a social obligation to 'shield' their women and thus led to many of the gender-based inequalities that flourished in the 20th century such as owning property, participating in civil issues or the work force, and even voting (Cushman, 2010).

the 1980s, research into the effects of media has been called either transactional or negotiated, that is to say that while media images present one version of reality, those images must continue to compete with other, non-media sources that interact with the user to create their own opinions and form their worldviews (McQuail, 2010). The world is now permanently online and permanently connected, so the Internet has been able to win the battle for competition with other sources, particularly with the advent of smartphones and other handheld devices capable of online access. Most people, even young children, can browse the web at all hours of the day and night in complete privacy and with complete anonymity (Vorderer et al., 2018). These facts have altered the way scholars consider and research the effects of media just as dramatically as the Internet itself has altered the world.

There are three core features of contemporary media effects theories: selectivity, transactionality, and conditionality. Selectivity refers to the way in which the consumer chooses media messages that serve their needs, reinforce their beliefs, and support their goals (Lazarsfeld et al., 1948). The major theory that developed out of selectivity is called uses and gratifications, which is based on the ideas that only a limited number of messages can attract an individual at any given time, use of media is a result of personal factors of the consumer (such as mood, personality, and social need), and that only selected messages have the power to influence (Klapper, 1960). Transactionality refers to the reciprocal nature of communication; for example, stereotypical alpha males may select violent SEIM that debases women, which, in turn, may increase and reinforce their own sexist[7] and misogynistic attitudes and behaviors toward women. Conditionality elaborates on some of the aforementioned theories, but posits that media effects are not standard for all users and can be contingent on other, non-media factors (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013). The complication to study and research on present and future media effects theories is the concept that many users do not limit themselves to a single media stream at once, but

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[7] Social-psychological media effects studies have documented fortification of sexist stereotypes cultivated in the regular players of video games that depict gender roles in the same way (Dill & Thill, 2007).

instead consume multiple streams simultaneously. Watching a movie on Netflix can be combined with other media usage such as chatting or texting with friends, posting to social media, or online searches about the movie's production.[8] The study of multiple media stream effects is in its infancy, as is the study of newer concepts like 'masspersonal' and mass self-communication; for instance the Proteus Effect[9] demonstrates how people often incorporate features from their digital online avatars into their physical, personal appearance in their offline reality (Yee & Bailenson, 2007).

When it comes to theories of media effects, there have been many over the decades, some of which are now obsolete, some of which have evolved or been combined, and some that are so new adequate studies have yet to be completed. For the purposes of this article, only the theories related to the correlation between media exposure and resulting behavior and attitudes will be discussed; these include Cultivation Theory, Exemplification Theory, Priming Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, Excitation Transfer Theory, Narrative Effects, and the Reinforcing Spirals Model of Selective Media Exposure. In much the same way that scholars in the 1960s realized that television would not be a temporary fad, the multiple streams of media exposure in the permanently online permanently connected world of the 2020s is also here to stay. Consumers of media are immersed in an [Internet-mediated[10]] environment that determines their understanding and constructs their social reality (Gerbner, 1969), therefore it becomes necessary to develop critical media literacy so that scholars and consumers alike can understand how the messages in exposed media impact the individual as well as society as a whole. There is a relationship between media consumption and reality perception.

Cultivation Theory was first developed in the 1960s and 1970s to explain the cultural changes associated with the television age; however, the conclusions can be applied to the Internet age too. The

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[8] Dr. Jane Brown of the University of North Carolina coined the phrase Media Diet to encapsulate the entirety of media selected by youth and adolescents.
[9] The Proteus Effect is similar to prior research on the effects of exemplars (see further in article) and is consistent with priming theory (see below).
[10] Paraphrased from the original: television-mediated.

theory states (updated and paraphrased) that the more time people spend immersed in a media-exposed world, like the Internet or television, the more likely they believe the version of reality portrayed through those media channels. The messages encoded in the media, regardless of what they are, invade the users' brains and become part of their social paradigm.[11] Gerbner referred to this idea as the *Symbolic Environment* – essentially, the narrative commonalities that exist across all media messages that, when combined, provide the audience with their perception of the way of the world and the way the world should be (Gerbner et al., 1980). The manner in which characters on television or users online are treated, including entire groups, affects the consumers' views about those people and groups in the real world.[12] The heavier the user, the more impactful the media influence. One can extrapolate that in the permanently online permanently connected society, media influence is exponentially greater than it was on the television age culture Gerbner and his colleagues studied in fifty years ago.

> *"While no member of society remains unaffected by an influence so persuasive as television, those who spend more time in the world of TV have been found to be more likely to perceive the real world in terms of television's lessons."* (Gerbner et al., 1978).

The challenges that Gerbner faced in developing Cultivation Theory in a television-mediated environment are also exponentially increased when scholars look through the POPC lens of our Internet mediated civilization. While Gerbner found that television use was part of a complex and dynamic process for all users despite the frequency and recency of exposure, in 2021, the Internet has pervaded most aspects of most of our lives. The average teenager and adult turn toward the Internet for a variety of reasons including entertainment,[13] information, work, school, and other daily life tasks. When it comes to

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[11] It is outside the scope of this article but worth mentioning the impact of Donald Trump's "Big Lie" on right-wing social conservative groups using the Internet to fuel and reinforce myths about the stolen election in relation to Cultivation Theory.

[12] Gerbner called this concept *Cultivation Differential* and used it to explain how television reinforces stereotypes based on the characters; for instance, if young black men are depicted as criminals, the consumer will adopt the perception that black men in the real world are mostly criminals.

[13] One of the reasons for so much media usage is the user's need to escape their lives; there are three major causes for this need including sociological (driven by stress), individual-psychological (driven by personal reasons like having nothing to do), and social-psychological (driven by negative social interactions, such as rejection, isolation, or embarrassment) (Henning & Vorderer, 2001).

the circumstances of multiple media streams exposure, it becomes virtually impossible to study the indirect effects of media exposure to any statistical significance. The search for direct causation becomes fruitless, so one must look for a corollary connection regarding the degree of media influence upon the differing types of consumers. Multiple media streams does not account for multiple non-media influences either (a point that will be discussed later). The evolution of Cultivation Theory led to the idea of first-order judgments and second-order judgments, the relationship between the two, and how they affect the users' real-world perceptions based upon their media exposure (Hawkins & Pingree, 1990). What is most important within the scope of this article is that second-order judgments relate to people's attitudes and beliefs (such as, 'the world is not safe,' or, 'people cannot be trusted'). These judgments form in the memory of the user and are influenced by both real-world events and media exposure. Many of these judgments can occur, not from the individual's personal, first-hand knowledge, but from impressions of memories gathered and blended from a variety of sources, including media.[14] The ability of the individual to imagine a scene aids in retention of the memory, therefore, memories drawn from sources that are visual (such as television or the Internet) tend to be stronger and more prevalent than those the individual may have experienced one time, long ago themselves, or from oral stories shared from others (Shrum, 1997). Suffice it to say that the judgments made from media sources have the potential for a greater impact on our society as a whole than all other sourced judgments made in the real-world both today and throughout the course of human history.

Media Priming Theory deals with accessibility of memories and how those memories are activated through media exposure and other sources. When a user watches a piece of media similar in nature or

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[14] Other scholars investigated genre-specific cultivation because the influence of programming changes based upon the type of story and the type of consumer. Certain genres, it was found, could be used to predict conceptions of masculinity, approval of physical and verbal aggression, and opinions regarding acceptance of divorce, abortions, and other behaviors such as alcohol and substance use or pre-marital sex (Scharrer & Blackburn, 2018). Others studied cultivation based on video games and found first and second order judgments in gamers related to interpersonal aggression, hostile sexism, and rape-myth acceptance (Fox & Potocki, 2016).

content to previously-stored information in the user's mental construct, that media primes, or activates, the same nodes in the brain (like a crankshaft primes a combustion engine) and similar concepts become connected or joined together. The theory suggests that when a user is over-exposed to violent media, similar situations in his real life will activate those memories and alter behavior and attitudes. Because of our permanently online permanently connected society, many media sourced memories are *chronically accessible*,[15] meaning that consumers that are exposed to the similar message of the media system have these ideas reinforced on a daily or even hourly basis. Priming Theory is strengthened by the frequency of the exposure and how recently the media was viewed. Handheld devices with unfettered Internet access have created the need for much more research into the effects of priming theory. One of the most important aspects of this theory deals with normative beliefs,[16] which are subjectively based on the culture in which a media user exists. Whichever norms are more readily accessible are the ones the person will fall back on when faced with a behavioral decision. The frequency and recency of exposure to media messages impacts the way the brain accesses the norms. The strongest norms[17] are accessed the quickest and most often; additionally, these norms act like default settings within the user's mind so that the user does not have to spend as much time and energy critically thinking about each individual situation (Rhodes et al., 2014). People seek out sources to develop their own norms, including media, and when faced with the dilemma about how to act in a particular circumstance will rely on their ability to access their environment for those answers. That means that the brains of media consumers are wired to directly

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[15] The three domains of chronic accessibility are construct, attitude, and norm whereby construct refers to the frame around which users' perceptions are crafted, attitude refers to how quickly a user's opinions can be activated (such as an automatic 'dislike' reaction when they see a cockroach), and norm refers to the way in which a user's inherent beliefs impact their choices and behaviors in the real-world (some of these beliefs are sourced from peers, from parents, and from the media). Research has demonstrated that consumers interpret films, television programs, and newspapers based upon the accessibility of any attitudes and beliefs those sources trigger, like sexism, racism, homophobia, or smokers (Eno & Ewoldsen, 2010).

[16] As discussed in the Theory of Reasoned Action, or TRA (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010).

[17] There are two types of norms: descriptive and injunction. Descriptive norms refer to how typical certain behaviors are in a group while injunctive norms refer to a user's trust that his or her behavior will be accepted by the important members in life (Cialdini et al., 1990).

access information, opinions, and attitudes sourced from the media messages they select, which then prime the user to continue believing or acting in the same ways.[18] Violence in media has the ability to influence people's behaviors,[19] especially in the short-term (recency), with effects ranging from desensitization to violent behavior (Huesmann et al., 2013). Why do so many people enjoy watching violence in their media consumption? One reason may be that through vicarious participation, certain individuals are purged of any need to commit violence themselves.[20] Another may be that humans have a psychological need to assert their dominance over others (Adler, 1927), thus a viewer of violence in media would share that power through the characters in consumed media (the way many pornography-users feel empowered by watching scenes in which women are sexually assaulted through rough and degrading treatment).

The *General Aggression Model* (or GAM) seeks to explain how violent media influences aggressive attitudes and behaviors (C.A. Anderson, Gentile, & Buckley, 2007). The reactions of users to violent media is subjective upon their personality and life situation. No two users will react exactly the same way. These external variables prime aggression at differing levels and can result in a mixture of emotions and thoughts. Of course, a confident user can choose to override negative messages with their own norms, but with the constant barrage of these messages in the POPC world that has become increasingly difficult for users to do, especially children and adolescents. In addition to anger, priming theory has the potential to reinforce stereotypes and individuals' perceptions of these groups, including (but not limited to)

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[18] Not all primes are created equal. The frequency, recency, and strength of the prime have greater effects on judgments and behaviors (Higgins et al., 1985).

[19] The U.S. Surgeon General reported a "strong" relationship between media violence consumption and short-term aggression (U.S. Surgeon General, 2001), following the Columbine High School Shooting in 1999; prior to that, the NTVS, the National Television Violence Study (three years) confirmed a link between consumption of television violence and aggressive behavior among youth (Wilson et al., 1998).

[20] Some studies have corroborated this motivational factor (Geen & Quanty, 1977), however the vast majority of research supports a more transactional relationship between violence in the real world and exposure to violent media.

gender,[21] race,[22] and mental illness.[23] Gender stereotypes are of particular note within the scope of this article since the messages of gender inequality found in SEIM as well as other mainstream media (such as rock and hip hop music videos) illustrate the patriarchal ideas that women are less than men. Psychologists in one study concluded that, "sexualized women were perceived as having the least control over their own lives," which suggests that, "sexualized women are more closely associated with being the objects… of action (Cikara et al., 2011)." Priming these types of stereotypes can also spread influence to other judgments; studies consistently illustrate a circular relationship between the habitual consumption of the media messages found in hardcore SEIM and gender-based violence and aggressive or harassing behaviors, (see Figure 1, Malamuth et al., 2000); furthermore, in a 20 year old survey of American high school students, 83% of girls reported experiencing some form of sexual harassment (Lipson, 2001). While other media effects theories are limited in scope (Desensitization refers to long-term effects, Priming Theory refers to only short-term, et cetera), GAM steps back to look at the larger portrait of the induction of aggression in media consumers. One of the theory's biggest strengths is its explanation of how violence impacts cognitive learning processes. Knowledge structures in the brain are rerouted with exposure to too much violence by convincing the user that the best way to deal with any conflict or feelings of anger is to rely on aggression and violence (Bushman & Anderson, 2002). Over a long enough timeline, these physiological responses imbed themselves in the individual and become part of his personality.

Social Cognitive Theory[24] explains how people learn how to act and be motivated to behave through their observations of others. However, the theory does not imply that mimicry is all that there is;

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[21] Hansen, C.H. & Hansen, R.D. (1988). How rock music videos can change what is seen when boy meets girl: Priming stereotypic appraisal of social interaction. Sex Roles. 19. 287-316. Doi:10.1007/BF00289839

[22] Arendt, F. (2017). Impulsive facial-threat perceptions after exposure to stereotypic crime news. Communication Research. 44. 793-816. Doi:10.1177/0093650214565919

[23] Holman, L. & McKeever, R. (2017). The Andrea Yates effect: Priming mental illness stereotypes through exemplification of postpartum disorders. Health Communication. 32. 1284-1296. Doi:10.1080/10410236.2016.1219929

[24] Pavlov's dog is likely the first example that comes to mind with regard to the study of behaviorism and learning. SCT was first developed by Albert Bandura as an answer to the shortcomings of prior theories, taking into account environmental cues and their influence into general behaviorism (Bandura, 1986).

it seeks to incorporate the concept of human agency into the equation, asserting that there are certain transactional relationships between the media and the consumer's environment, personality, and disposition. Isolating the cause, for example, of why people do bad things or commit crimes, is (as mentioned above) virtually impossible due to the complex nature of these relational factors. Media effects, therefore, do not exist on a one-way continuum, but rather within the framework of a user's entire mental network of personal history and genetics, present circumstances, relationships with others, and selective media usage. That being said, SCT seeks to illustrate correlations between media exposure and behavior while incorporating the other threads in the transactional web.

According to Bandura, there are four ways that learning occurs through behavioral imitation: symbolization, self-regulation, self-reflection, and vicarious capability (Bandura, 2001). People have the ability to create symbolic representations of observed events through indirect observation and can further regulate and modify behaviors and attitudes through experiencing both the positive and negative consequences enacted on those observed. Those observations then lead to self-reflection when the individual applies the observed lessons to hypothetical, future, or unobserved situations (Pajares et al., 2009). This is a vital component of human evolution that enables us to learn from others rather than having to directly experience every possible circumstance ourselves (or reinvent the proverbial wheel). SCT is one of the primary reasons civilization has developed at all; but, in addition there are four processes that must also be present for learning to occur. These are attention, retention, motor reproduction, and motivation. Using SEIM exposure as an example, the user first experiences the 'reinforcing spiral' of viewing hardcore, sexually-explicit (and violent) media material while masturbating (attention). The combination of sexual arousal, climax, and dopamine release in the brain helps the user to focus greater intensity on the images and messages observed. Secondly, the user remembers the images, which have been burned into memory hotter because of the arousal; this step is strengthened through frequency of exposure, so those users that are habitual or addicted learn the messages in the media quicker and more

deeply (retention). Thirdly, when the user finds himself with a girl and engaged in sexual activities, he is in a position to be physically capable of repeating the observed behaviors (motor reproduction). And finally, the user must desire the same outcome of his behavior as the outcome observed in the media messages (in this case sexual desire, arousal, and climax) or else modeling does not occur (motivation). Pre-existing beliefs or attitudes impact the way in which the user assimilates the media messages. Some users may learn observed behaviors to the point that they model them in every instance, while others do not model at all.[25] Those differences come down to individual motivation and the user's ability to critically analyze the messages inherent in the media.[26] The opposite applies too: the messages in certain media provides consumers to learn behaviors and attitudes that then become part of their personal identity (Slater & Hayes, 2010). The mode of persuasion that emphasizes emotional engagement is called Pathos. Producers of pornography rely heavily on the connection between their depictions and the users' emotional states and tailor the messages (through content, structure, style and imagery) in an effort to hook the user to watch more and more of their material. They also rely on getting youthful viewers watching their product – the earlier the better – teens and pre-teens fashion their emerging identities and draw many influences from media sources, the cumulative effects of over exposure to harmful ideas feeds into the process (Steele & Brown, 1995). It need not be a complicated message, in fact, the simplest ideas, repeated thousands of times, will help the masses remember them more thoroughly – reiteration leads to persuasive influence (LaBelle, 1980). Over time, dominant messages found in the consumed media, messages that did not originate from within the consumer will find their way into his or her identity construction and perceptions of social reality.

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[25] Edward Donnerstein's research concluded that depictions of violence against women in media, even those absent of sexually-explicit content, could condition men to have aggressive attitudes and behaviors toward women (Russell, 1980).

[26] Not all viewers of misogynistic pornography subscribe to the beliefs that women are inferior to men or deserve to be treated in such a way. There has been an increase in these views because of the Internet. Also, if one teenage boy believed that his peer group would support aggressive behavior and attitudes, he is more likely to engage in it (Bandura, 1986).

Reinforcement further complicates an already complex set of circumstances since positive behaviors are generally rewarded and negative ones generally punished. Unfortunately, the media frames potentially negative behaviors in such a way as to show users that bad behavior is rewarded and positive behavior is punished. Characters who maintain stereotypical attitudes and behaviors also qualify within the realm of rewards and punishments; repeated activation of the stereotypic myth leads to the cultivation of continued belief and chronic accessibility of those and related ideas (Bargh et al., 1986). So when the male actor in a pornographic image mistreats a female actor and she responds to him in a positive way that strokes the sexuality of the user, the message that women like to be mistreated is then reinforced, putting the user in the strange position of indirectly observing a positive outcome of a negative behavior. He may, depending on those other personal factors, repeat the modeled behavior in real life, expecting to receive the same rewards.[27] Observed messages in media connected to strong emotions (such as sexuality and aggression) increase the likelihood of retention and duplication. Children, specifically, use media messages to learn how to behave and how not to behave (Akers, 1990). There have been multiple studies on media effects related to aggression[28] and only more recently have scholars begun to look into problematic attitudes and behaviors like risky sexual activity and gender stereotyping.[29] In fact, studies have documented traditional gender norms and even blatant sexism is commonly modeled in media (Aubrey, 2004). Two studies in particular found a consistent pattern of results in cross-sectional studies that exposed teenagers and adolescents to teen movies and gender roles (Behm-Morawitz &

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[27] When young girls are indoctrinated into the misogynistic patriarchal society of toxic masculinity, they begin to normalize these behaviors and results. Once they are normalized, the expectation becomes mainstream in that all females tolerate the idea that 'boys will be boys'.

[28] *See also: Martins & Wilson, 2012; Fikkers et al, 2016; Boyson & Smith, 2005; Greitemeyer & Mugge, 2014; and Eyel & Rubin, 2003.

[29] In a study about "hookup culture," Aubrey and Smith (2016) used SCT with first-year college students and found that exposure to sexually-oriented magazines and television predicted positive attitudes regarding hooking up, particularly among the male groups.

Mastro, 2008) as well as sexually objectifying television (Rousseau & Eggermont, 2018) respectively. SCT can predict such outcomes based upon the effects of media exposure.

Pornography (like other media avenues) tells a story. Some of the story elements are direct while others can be discovered through the subtext or context. Oftentimes, the user is not even aware that these narrative elements are passing through the media into his perceptions of reality. These narrative effects seek to persuade the media consumer to agree with the version of reality presented in the images or words. There are a few theories as to the impact of these specific types of effects on the users of media, some of which deal with sexually-explicit material within the scope of this article. The first of which is called the *Transportation-Imagery Model*, or TIM, and asserts that a media consumer's beliefs can be altered when he or she becomes immersed in the narrative world of media;[30] furthermore, these users become less likely to argue against the messages contained in the 'story' (Green & Brock, 2002; Green, 2004). As mentioned earlier, the incorporation of sexual climax coupled with the absorption of the images in SEIM increases the strength of the narrative effects on the consumer.[31] During masturbation, the user of pornography traditionally separates himself into a quiet and private environment further increasing the impact of these effects (Zwarun & Hall, 2012). Narrative-based change is a concept that explains that users' beliefs and attitudes can be altered to be more in line with those found in the media, including new beliefs adopted directly from the media (Banerjee & Greene, 2013). Attitudes are altered more when the user is able to identify with the character(s) in the narrative[32] and when the unfolding images keep him

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[30] This theory was originally designed related to the written word, but is more applicable to visual media since mental imagery plays a central role in the user's ability to simulate re-imagining of the events in the story (Mazzocco & Brock, 2006). With regard to pornography viewing, the user typically puts himself into the scene, and then is able to use recall to recreate the images when sexually active with a real female (often insisting that she behave in the way the porn actress from the narrative behaved).

[31] Contralaterally to the scope of this article, narrative immersion suggests that the user loses all track of time when "lost in a book," which is consistent with the reported behavior of sex and porn addicts who waste hours trapped in a never-ending stream of SEIM – 19% of sampled college students in one study scored within the clinical range for sex addiction (Giordano & Cashwell, 2017).

[32] Narrative identification can occur in two ways; first, the user puts himself into the media and can see himself acting out the behaviors of the character (some pornography is filmed P.O.V. or point of view style, almost literally giving the user the perspective of the male actor performing the sexually-explicit activities), and second, the user is able to

emotionally engaged, also known as emotional flow (Nabi & Green, 2015). Even for the user that does not initially agree with gender-inequality, with enough viewings, the sexist attitudes found in SEIM will begin to persuade through the user's subconscious that women want and deserve that same treatment (abuse and assault). As stated earlier, not every user will be equally influenced by these narrative effects, and environmental factors alter the strength of the messages and other persuasive elements found in the media.

A generation ago, the concept of media choice merely referred to which of the fifty cable channels a consumer would decide to watch at any given moment, which newspaper he subscribed to, the genre of movies he enjoyed watching, or other similar and static selections. In 2021, newspapers, television programs, feature films, books, music, radio, journals, and short videos (not to mention hardcore pornography) are all disseminated by the Internet (Lugmayr & Dal Zotto, 2016). In this regard, exposure to media is more of a barrage on the senses than at any point in the past (especially when considering the aforementioned concept of multiple media streams occurring simultaneously). What motivates a consumer to choose what he chooses? One model that seeks to explain selective exposure is called the *Dynamic-Transactional Model*, first introduced in 1982 by Fruh and Schonbach, who stated that, "inter-transactions denote imagined or actual interaction between communicator and recipient, which can influence both parties[33]." Their theory applies to SEIM use in a few ways, the most integral of which is that the user fantasizes about participating in the action during the time he spends observing and engaged in the media narrative. So the imagined interaction between the consumer and the actors influences the consumer's attitudes and behaviors regarding both the media selection and how he treats his real-life partners during any sexual activities. More recently, the *Reinforcing Spirals Model* emphasizes the

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act out the behaviors he engages with in his real-life sexual encounters. In both instances, the direct personal experience and the narrative experience are interchangeable.

[33] Translated from the original [German] in Der dynamisch-transaktionale Ansatz. Ein neues Paradigma der Medienwirkungen. Publizistik. 27(1-2). 74-88.

dynamic nature of the transactional relationship between user and media (Slater, 2007), focusing on the media messages' abilities to reinforce attitudes already present in the user. For instance, an alpha male with traditional views on gender roles, and acceptance of rape-myth narratives, could potentially watch sexually-explicit media that demeans and assaults women and subsequently believe even stronger in those gender stereotypic ideas and behaviors.

One theoretical approach that deals more with the user's regulation of inner states through media selection is called *Mood Management Theory*, or MMT. Essentially, the consumer's mood in the moment dictates his or her media choices to enhance or improve the mood of pleasure seekers and dissonance avoiders (Zillmann, 1983); for example, exciting messages to overcome boredom, calming messages to overcome stress, or SEIM to help with frustration through sexual release. Consumers may also choose messages that help them to ignore the source of any negativity in their lives[34] – the hypothetical being that watching a male actor in a pornographic scene 'score' with an attractive woman (as well as provide her with a screaming orgasm herself) would lessen the sting of rejection that the user felt earlier when he was shot down at the bar, a message further reinforced through the arousal and climax he experiences while watching. In fact there is empirical support for the overly masculine males preferred to engage in negative media content to sustain any anger and aggression rather than positive media content that might help them dissipate their negative mood (Knobloch-Westerwick & Alter, 2006). According to this theory, consumers develop associations between the media content and its impact on their mood. Therefore, MMT has the ability to accurately predict media choices based on the psychology of the user.

The *Selective Exposure of Self- and Affect- Management Model* conjectures that consumers intentionally choose media messages to activate and regulate specific cognitive states and behavior and to reinforce their own self-image (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015). An individual's idea of themselves aides

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[34] It is interesting to note, though outside the scope of this article, that Johnson and Knobloch-Westerwick observed in 2014 that people in negative moods viewed negative social media posts for longer time periods than positive posts to allow for a 'downward social comparison' to help give the user a sense of superiority.

their media choices, so for instance when the user in the above hypothetical feels the need to empower

his own masculinity, he may choose pornographic media that portrays the male actor dominating the

female.[35] Other studies have confirmed this, yielding that groups prone to negative stereotyping revealed

a preference for negative representations of outgroups and gained a self-esteem boost from that media

exposure (Knobloch-Westerwick & Hastall, 2010).[36] The alteration of our sense of self requires giving up

a part of our uniqueness so identification with the characters in a narrative would influence the

interrelated beliefs, traits, and perceptions that make us who we are, for better[37] – or for worse (Kearney

& O'Sullivan, 2003). Again, following sexual frustration, a male user may often choose to turn to SEIM of

a more-violent nature that depicts the abuse or punishment of a woman in order for him to feel better

about himself. As stated earlier, there are many aspects of a media consumer's personal environment and

background that influence his selective exposure; anticipated social interaction, with like-minded people,

can shape media selection (Dillman-Carpentier, 2009), including that which occurs in the online world

through social media use. The locker-room talk of alpha males[38] in a single peer group could influence

media selection to that which reinforces traditional gender roles and stereotypes, and keeps women

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[35] Producers understand this and that is one of the reasons why most cinematography of contemporary pornography focuses on the female's body, oftentimes cutting off the entire head of the male actor. This angle helps to facilitate the consumer's ability to fantasize and place himself into the scene.

[36] This study and others have successfully applied SESAM to political messages, race and gender portrayals, health communication, and music videos.

[37] Most of these studies have focus on the positive changes associated with healthy behaviors after exposure to media, but negative changes would also be consistent with the findings. A young male viewer might begin to assert a more aggressive style of masculinity after frequent and repeated exposure to the characters in SEIM. Furthermore, much study has been done by Mastro that has demonstrated in-group favoritism and outgroup vilification when those messages and images are regularly displayed and absorbed from media stereotypic characters (Mastro, 2003). Women, in SEIM, are the out-group and men are the in-group; it is no wonder that hardcore Internet pornography reinforced identification with gender inequality.

[38] Hyper-gender-orientation, aka toxic masculinity, was found to predict exposure to violent SEIM; these men/boys responded differently to that type of media imagery than those who scored lower on the trait profile (Vandenbosch, 2015). The sample of males in this study were college-age; however, if the exposure to violent pornography is proven to influence gender identity, then exposure at younger ages can be presumed to be a predictor of hyper-masculinity once those groups age into the same group studies. A longitudinal study may, therefore, prove the correlating relationship between violent pornography viewing and gender-based aggression, violence, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, roles, and stereotypes.

subservient to males.[39] The sexual subordination and objectification of women remain the most consistent research findings (Dillman-Carpentier & Stevens, 2018; Lynch, et al., 2016; To et al., 2012). Media messages that echo traditional gender stereotypes create reductionist judgments whereby the minds of men are encoded to believe that all women are the same as they are portrayed in the media – another effect of priming. Similar to the interactions between likeminded peers in a social group.[40] There also exists quasi-interaction between the media consumer and the characters therein, known as a para-social relationship, and explains how users come to know and think of their favorite characters and celebrities as friends (Horton & Wohl, 1956). The more that a user's self-image corresponds to that of the characters in the narrative, the stronger his feeling of para-sociality[41] and the greater his enjoyment of the media. Therefore, both hyper-masculine males and hypo-masculine males will feel a strong relationship to the male models in SEIM (who behave the way they secretly want to) and the female models (who are the women they want to be with and are responding to the male characters the way the male users wish to be).[42]

It is those emotions that play a central role in the selection and influence of individual's media choices. Initially, it seems, most consumers choose media they enjoy for the purpose of enjoyment, but

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[39] Women in media tend to be portrayed as more attractive, thinner, and younger than their male counterparts; they also behave more sexually than the men in non-pornographic media, specifically music videos, in which multiple analyses have revealed that females are more likely to display body parts, dress more provocatively, engage in sexualized dance, and be more sexualized and objectified (Aubrey & Frisby, 2011).

[40] Men who commit sexual violence against women they know, often have the type of male friends who may encourage the abuse (DeKeseredy, 2015).

[41] Consumers think about media for a long time after exposure, discuss with friends, or post on social media; furthermore, some individuals may pretend to interact with those characters or in those situations, or even imagine themselves as the characters (Slater et al., 2017). This retrospective involvement has long-term impacts on the sense of self and most certainly will impact the relationships the user has with others in real life (for instance, a male pornography user may treat his significant other as if she is the adult actress, fantasize about her looking or acting like the actress, or even request that she behave in such a way).

[42] Exemplification Theory further posits that characters in media act as examples for others to emulate. For instance, over-sexualized female celebrities become exemplars for all women in the real world, the results of which are that males expect women to look and act a certain way, and young girls feel pressured to wear more makeup, dress sexier, and behave in sexually-suggestive ways that attract negative attention from the boys in their peer group (Zillmann, 1983). Mainstream media, pop culture, and SEIM then groom girls to emphasize their sexuality and groom boys to be future sexual predators.

that furthermore, their level of enjoyment is based upon their dispositions toward the characters depicted

and the outcomes those characters experience (Raney & Bryant, 2002). Characters the consumers identify

with are rooted for[43] and characters from out-groups are rooted against. It becomes easy to see how a

hyper-gender-oriented male would be drawn to sexually-explicit media that depicts women as 'other' in

subservient and even degrading roles by the male characters the user seemingly relates to. The intensity

of emotion a media consumer feels changes over time in two opposing, but integral ways with regard to

the hypothesis of this article. The first is *Excitation Transfer Theory*, positing that when a user is aroused

(to sexuality or violence) the emotional response of that user becomes more intense (Zillmann, 1983).

This theory is true of all media, but particularly valid with regard to any media consumed by a user that is

sexually aroused and working toward climax, as most of the habitual users of SEIM are doing.[44] Regarding

general media violence of a non-sexual nature, a consumer, directly following exposure to violent images,

would be in a heightened state of arousal, and if confronted or provoked, is more likely to respond

aggressively (Ireland et al., 2018). The second is more well-known and widely accepted; *Desensitization* is

the phenomenon whereby the consumer of media becomes dulled to his repeated exposure of one level

of intensity and then must increase the intensity in order to feel heightened emotions again (Carnagey,

Anderson, & Bushman, 2007). Desensitization is why many pornography viewers self-reported their

viewing habits changing over time to more intense and severe forms of the media (for instance, the SEIM

they enjoy containing more violent scenes or watching child pornography). For decades, scholars have

been concerned with and interested in the effects of exposure to violence in media on the behaviors of

the consumers. The violence in SEIM has not been studied as much, but the results of the studies related

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[43] One study found that participants who were exposed to a 'stupid' character in a narrative underperformed on a subsequent exam (Appel, 2011). It can be presumed then that character traits are assimilated into the self; therefore, the aggression displayed in hardcore SEIM could transfer to become part of the user's self-identity. Additionally, users can adopt the perspectives of characters to which they relate.
[44] "Consumption intensifies attitudes supportive of sexual coercion and increases their likelihood of perpetrating assault," (Flood, 2009).

to non-sexual violent media are consistent with the findings in sexually-explicit-based studies.[45] In one, college-aged men were shown horror films that portrayed violence against women; by the end of the viewing period, the participants did not find the films to be degrading to women and were less sympathetic to female rape victims than the control group (Linz et al., 1984). Clearly, emotions are at the core of all of the theories mentioned thus far with regard to behavioral effects of media exposure, but not enough research has been done as to how the effects of media translate to users' behavior.[46] Not all users of pornography turn into violent rapists; there are external factors that contribute to the traits that turn people's behavior aggressive. The correlation that has been observed is that the more accepting of prostitution men are, the more likely they are to adhere to rape-myths and to subscribe to more traditional roles and stereotypes for the genders, including hyper-masculinity and feminine subservience (Farley et al., 2010).

Perhaps the most comprehensive, and modern models of media effects is the *Differential Susceptibility to Media Effects Model*. Both media and media effects are not homogenous so it becomes integral to consider the user in each situation in which media effects may or may not be present (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013). Media content will influence a user's response (this almost goes without saying) and that response will influence the impact of said media. Critical media literacy is becoming increasingly necessary in this day and age so that consumers can understand the content they are exposed to; many people, particularly children,[47] do not seem to understand that media messages are crafted, shaped, and delivered with a specific agenda, and that agenda may not be something the user agrees

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[45] *See General Aggression Model.

[46] Video game players are rewarded for aggression, often in the form of killing enemies, and because of the realism of the violence in these games, the player(s) often learn how and when to channel that aggression and are motivated to do so (Bandura, 2001). Longitudinal surveys have concluded that the more violence observed in media, the higher likelihood that the user will engage in aggressive outcomes afterward (Greitemeyer & Sagioglou, 2017).

[47] Younger children are more at risk of negative outcomes associated with media violence (Paik & Comstock, 1994). Children, particularly those seven years of age and under, struggle to separate reality from fantasy because of their still-developing cognitive capacity as well as struggle to regulate their emotions and emotional responses to stimuli which can have longer lasting implications.

with. Furthermore, researchers have demonstrated reciprocity between violent media and aggression, whereby the aggression fuels violent media selection and violent media selection fuels aggression (Slater et al., 2004). Overall, there seems to be an aggregate relationship between violence in media and its effects on users. Large segments of society, potentially in the millions of consumers, will experience severe consequences of violent media saturation, culminating over time (Fikkers, 2016). Not all content is produced in the same way with the same intentions. Not all consumers respond to the content in the same ways.[48] The production as well as the selection of media contribute to the potential effects on any consumer. It is therefore obvious to assume that content matters. The less violence toward women that appears in media, the less violence toward women will occur in the real world.

Although it has already been mentioned, the sexuality depicted in media and its effects on the consumers will be discussed in more detail at this point beginning with *Sexual Script Theory*, also known as the *Sexual Script Acquisition, Activation, and Application Model (3AM) of Sexual Media Socialization* (P.J. Wright, 2011). Scripts are acquired guidelines[49] for sexual behavior that are implanted in the brain and can be accessed regularly when needed and the easiest accessed script(s) will be the one(s) most utilized. Compounding the issue is the aspect of arousal, which if present when the script was encoded, increases the likelihood of later application (Hald & Malamuth, 2015). The scripts have a direct impact on the individual's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, the effects of which can also be more abstract and not only concrete. For example, a regular user of pornography may never go out and directly sexually assault a partner, but may instead – in a more abstract way – acquire and then apply the sub-textual messages

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[48] Which is why not all regular users of SEIM sexually assault women; enough do though to warrant further study and possibly changes to the legal protections of such content. The DSMM helps explain this phenomenon (Piotrowski & Valkenburg, 2015). The disposition of individuals can amplify media effects, for instance, those with a strong need for sensation find violent media more aesthetically pleasing (Wegener & Petty, 1994). Finally, teens growing up in violent family homes, or with aggressive peer groups, are more aroused by media violence and subsequently are more likely to display aggression as adults (Fikkers et al., 2013; Fikkers et al., 2016).

[49] These guidelines answer questions such as the type of sexual acts one should be engaging in as well as 'with whom, when, how, under what circumstances, and to what consequence(s),' (P.J. Wright, 2011).

about gender roles, violence against women, and general sexuality to his own views.[50] American culture this century has become hyper-sexualized with overly sexualized media appearing at the core of the debate and associated studies.[51] More exposure and more frequent exposure to mainstream media has led to a near-universal acceptance of the belief that women are sexual objects (Ferris et al., 2007), rape-myth acceptance (Ward, 2016), tolerance of the use of force to have sex, reduced intentions to seek consent for sexual activity, and sexual assault (Kahlor & Eastin, 2011; Ybarra et al., 2014).[52] Furthermore, exposure to characters in mainstream media that successfully enact sexual behaviors – including 'hooking up' – may increase the consumer's confidence in their ability to do the same; moreover, a pornography user that views a male actor successfully convincing a stranger to accept money for sexual acts, or even one who sexually assaults a woman, may believe himself capable of similar actions.

The effects of sexually-explicit media on users has been investigated for decades. One common hypothesis is that exposure to this type of media increases the probability of risky sexual behaviors and sexist attitudes that are typically associated with the characters in the standard heterosexual, hardcore narrative of this genre. In cross-sectional and longitudinal studies, consumption of SEIM correlated to an increase in both non-sexual aggression (Hald et al., 2010) and actual acts of sexual aggression (Wright et al., 2016). Additionally, users of sexualized media (including pornography) were found to more likely to find fault with their sexual partners (Wright et al., 2017), fault with their own bodies or have an unhealthy

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[50] To include behaviors related-to but not directly observed in the media.

[51] Studies have correlated mainstream media (not specifically sexualized) with frequency of sexual intercourse, sex with multiple partners, extramarital sex, teenage pregnancy, sex in public, and lax attitudes regarding one night stands, casual sex, oral sex, multiple sexual partners (at the same time), and sexual favor exchange (Woo & Dominick, 2001).

[52] The research of Donald Mosher surveyed 256 college-aged males to ascertain how pornography impacted any 'sex calloused' attitudes the viewers may have and found that 58% of the men believed that, 'women like to be dominated and sometimes humiliated," 51% stated that women who are considered cock-teasers deserve to be raped, 39% did not consider a no to really mean no unless accompanied by a slap, and 24% said that whenever a woman gets 'uppity' it's time to 'fuck' her; furthermore, the same study showed that 26% of men reported a higher likelihood of using force, and believing that force was justified, to obtain sex from a woman, including behaviors like getting her drunk, falsely professing love, or showing her pornography (Russell, 1980) – statistics outdated, but it would be difficult to imagine the numbers have decreased in the POPC, hyper-sexualized world.

or a negative body image (Grabe et al., 2008), a less personal approach to sex in belief and behavior (Tokunaga et al., 2018), and that they deserved a more attractive partner than the one they had (Gwinn et al., 2013). Many other studies have linked pornography consumption with the objectification and sexualization of women and girls (Wright & Tokunaga, 2015; Peter & Valkenburg, 2009) and acceptance of the idea that 'no' really means 'yes,' (D'Abreu & Krahe, 2014).[53] Two leading experts used the term "common thread" in their research of the connections between sexual objectification and sexual violence and further found that the reduction of people to physical terms sets the stage for assault (Gervais & Eagan, 2017). Adults, who already have established sexual scripts in place will be less impacted by those they observe in SEIM, with younger viewers though, the pornographic scripts may write themselves into how viewers think and behave (Hald & Malamuth, 2013). But of all the results studied, perhaps the most telling and important is that across separate samples of adults in the United States, pornography use was able to strongly predict sexually aggressive attitudes and behaviors in hyper-masculine men who engage in or agree with casual sexual activity (Malamuth, 2018). There are many environmental factors that can reinforce or moderate these effects, including (but not limited to) early exposure to pornography, substance use, life satisfaction, relationship status, frequency and recency of exposure, and imagery explicitness. The more frequently these messages are acquired and accessed, the stronger their impact.[54] One study concluded that the most likely adolescent-aged user of SEIM is a pubertally-advanced, sensation-seeking male with troubled family relations, but also noted that when sexually-explicit material becomes normalized in a culture, as it has in 2021, its use might be predicted through a differing set of variables outside the definition of deviance (Peter & Valkenburg, 2016).

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[53] This list is by no means exhaustive, merely illustrative of the breadth and width of studies about the media effects of SEIM.

[54] Regular users of SEIM were found more likely to hold attitudes conducive to sexual aggression, assign women the role of providing men with sexual pleasure, expect women to be sexually accessible at all times, and engage in either verbal or physical aggression against women (Wright & Tokunaga, 2016).

Sexually-explicit Internet Material

Sexually-explicit Internet material is a form of prostitution and both are share characteristics with human trafficking: use of force, fraud, threats,[55] or coercion, ignoring women's lack of consent, crossing international or state borders for recruitment or distribution, and keeping the victims in positions of vulnerability (Burke, 2018; Hughes, 2010). The Internet is used to recruit victims that are prostituted to 'johns' personally, or appear in digitally filmed and produced versions of prostitution which are distributed to virtual 'johns' online (the latter is oftentimes worse since the trafficker makes money for selling the same sex act multiple times, and for the victim, once a digital record is made and distributed online, it can never be unmade. There are numerous ex-porn stars who regret that their body of work remains online and generating income for their traffickers[56]). In many instances, a teenage regular viewer of SEIM is rehearsing behaviors that will eventually lead to him seeking out strippers and prostitutes as an adult. The supply of pornography creates a demand for prostituted women. The manner in which pornography is produced – through the exploitation of social inequalities in order to prostitute women – as well as the manner in which the images are intended to impact their audience – conditioning sexual responses including violence, discrimination, and coercion – reinforce masculine domination (MacKinnon, 2005). The customers of pornography are no different than the customers of prostitutes; in both cases, men are exercising their self-given right of access to women's bodies and sexuality – a result of the patriarchal society's rules that perpetuate women's subordination to men (Miriam, 2005; Pateman, 1988). That access turns the victims of human trafficking (which are also the victims of prostitution and

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[55] What is the difference between a threat and what the pornographers call a 'proposal' to get women to participate in their filmed prostitution? A threat is a proposal indeed, but one that will make the person worse off to accept, additionally, it must include some type of an illegitimate offer or arouse fear of injury if turned down (Schulhofer, 1998).

[56] Clark-Foy, T. (2018). "Porn Actors Leigh Raven and Riley Nixon allege abuse, violence, and boundary violation on set." Jezebel.com. The agencies, "certainly know how to get [women] to do what they want," (Lederer, 1980).

pornography[57]) into a collection of commodified body parts that solely exist to pleasure men (Miriam, 2005). The average age in which a girl in the United States (not an undeveloped Asian country) enters prostitution is thirteen (Hunt, 2013; Kotrla, 2010),[58] and the average age that a youthful Internet user first encounters SEIM is eleven (Dines, 2010). There is a shockingly strong and negative reaction to the concepts of child pornography and child prostitution (more so than even to murderers); however, few seem to realize that children entering the sex trade are not different people than the women in it – they are the same exact females at two different points in the timeline (MacKinnon, 2005). So there are two groups of victims regarding SEIM: the girls in the media, who are being abused,[59] trafficked, exploited, and prostituted, and the boys sitting at their computers or smartphones unwittingly having their sexuality, attitudes, and behaviors about women and gender compromised through the hidden agenda of the pornography producers and human traffickers.

The major illusion of modern SEIM is that it is about sex. Pornography is not about sexuality, it is about the power that men hold over women. According to SEIM, the world is teeming with super-attractive women who are completely willing to sleep with anyone and everyone at any time. On the contrary, the users of SEIM never see that reflected in their real world experiences. It is that juxtaposition that infuriates them: "If all these men are getting 'lucky', why aren't I?" Pornography is essentially unjust

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[57] A small yet very vocal minority of female sex workers claim they are not victims of the sex industry, but rather have freely chosen to sell their bodies and their sexuality. The rebuttal to their position is multitudinous. Were these women ever really in a position to choose, or did their economic situation force them to turn to the sex trade? Was this "choice" merely a lack of options (why be a secretary when you can make more money taking off your clothes)? Did some sexual partner coerce or force them into first participating in unwanted sexual acts for him and his friends before pressing the record button on the camera? Perhaps, these women were defrauded by thinking they were going to be in a scene with a single other male participant to be distributed solely overseas only to arrive on set to discover three males and a website easily accessible in the United States? This was the case with Girlsdoporn; 22 victims successfully sued the parent production company for force, fraud, coercion, and sex trafficking and were awarded $13 million dollars in damages (Repard, 2020).

[58] Many of these victims, of Domestic Minor Sex Trafficking, or DMST, are recognized by family and friends when they appear in online sex ads long before their eighteenth birthday (Hughes, 2010).

[59] These women are raped and assaulted on camera for the purposes of strangers' sexual gratification; would anyone in her right mind freely choose that? (Hughes, 2010). Furthermore, SEIM falsely creates the image that ordinary men are able to commit easy-to-accomplish rape(s) free from consequences and remorse, gain sexual gratification from the assaultive actions, and that women enjoy being taken sexually by force (Russell, 1980).

– it is unjust to the men watching and in a completely different way, it is unjust to all women (including the performers) as well. Many of these consumers use pornography to enact revenge on any women who have wronged them in the past (Macleod et al., 2008), which is why there is an epidemic of pseudo-child-pornography, or PCP, that childifies and sexualizes adult women to appear like pre-teenage girls with pigtails, lollipops, and teddy bears – many men were rejected by girls while they were still in high school and those wounds have yet to heal. Regular viewing of PCP also conditions consumers of SEIM to become more accepting of the sexualization of children, leading to child sexual abuse. Following that train of thought, pseudo-child-pornography conditions the consumer to want to watch and then watch actual child pornography, which in turn, grooms the user to become a child sex offender; and this type of SEIM is vast in quantity and can easily be discovered by very inexperienced Internet users (Chase & Statham, 2005). In one study that interviewed incarcerated rapists and pedophiles, the researchers demonstrated that the average length of time between first encountering child pornography and sexually abusing a child was approximately one year (Flood, 2009).

The major shift in the sex industry from offline to online can be summed up in a single word: access. In 2002, high-speed broadband was introduced to the world and with it came the ability to download large sized video files in minutes. With 3G and up, streaming became the norm. The amount of sexually-explicit content online exploded. The Internet is not regulated nearly enough to protect impressionable, youthful users from a constant barrage of violent and age-inappropriate media images. While prostitution remains illegal in most corners of the United States, pornography, by contrast, can be found in every child's bedroom through the screens of their tablets, laptops, and smartphones. What was once relegated to the other side of the tracks, the seedy side of town, XXX cinemas, adult bookstores, and strip clubs is now seen every day by anyone who seeks it out online (and many who see it without wanting to). By the age of seventeen, 93% of boys and 62% of girls have been exposed to SEIM, and 13% viewed it

daily (Sun et al., 2016).[60] Given these statistics, it seems highly difficult to imagine a child making his way

to high school without having been exposed to SEIM. There is a general ignorance regarding the ways in

which unbridled access to the formulaic sexual scripts present in mainstream pornography rewrite

knowledge gained from sexual self-exploration, changing individual's sexuality to mirror that which is

found in these media images (Sanday, 2007). Nobody can deny the cultural changes that have occurred

since the invention of the smartphone; whether or not our attachment to our screens qualifies as an

addiction is a controversial debate. The world is now permanently online, permanently connected and

that presents difficulties for many users who try and put down their devices. Utilizing strategies that

casinos have used with slot machines, the developers of website content (videos, games, and others)

design their products to hook users and keep them coming back for more. Short-term rewards coupled

with flashing lights, bright colors, and frequent bells and whistles (literal and figurative) fool the user's

brain into needing a constant positive feedback loop (Alter, 2017). According to Alter, 40% of the general

population currently suffers from some type of Internet addiction – from gaming[61] to shopping to

pornography.[62] And when the feedback loop involves sexual arousal and gratification, it is strengthened

(Akers, 1990); adding violence into the mix conditions users to connect arousal to abuse and assault. Of

course, behavioral addictions are easier to hide than substance addictions, particularly when considering

Internet use is anonymous and private. Many of these adolescents and teens spend so much time staring

at two-dimensional representations of people, developing only para-social relationships, and avoiding

[60] The same study found that almost 50% of boys were exposed to SEIM before the age of thirteen, and another study demonstrated that 66% of all youthful Internet surfers experienced unwanted exposure to sexually-explicit material online (Wolak et al., 2007) – many of this content appears on a handheld device that users have in their possession all day, every day.

[61] Hilarie Cash runs a Seattle-based video game rehab center called reSTART, and in her experience, there is a link between gaming addiction and pornography. The Internet is, "a lot like feeding sugar to a hungry person. It's pleasurable in the short term, but eventually they'll starve… Our guys develop intimacy disorders. They don't have the skills to bring sexuality and intimacy together. Many turn to pornography instead of forming real relationships and they never seem to understand true intimacy," (Alter, 2017).

[62] Pornographic websites are coded to appear similar to gaming sites, intentionally, and are thus appealing and attractive to children, specifically young boys.

engaging in real-life relationships and experiences that they are developing a newly coined disorder called Compassion Deficit Disorder, whereby they only have learned negative ways of relating to others (Levin, 2008). The screen use and proclivity for text-based interactions becomes habitual, leading youthful users to have an easier time 'relating' to screens than real people and making regular exposure to the women in SEIM more desirable and the path of least resistance.

A recent trend in SEIM is similar to the trends in other Internet-based mainstream media such as Instagram, TikTok, and Youtube. The scenes and models are presented as 'amateurs,' females from the real world who either purposefully choose[63] to let a stranger have sex with them on camera for the entire world, or (and more common) inadvertently stumble into a pornography producer who uses coercion, fraud, and force to convince the girl to perform with him or his friends. This genre of SEIM is known as Gonzo, and it is a genre that intentionally blurs the lines between fact and fantasy. In the pornographic scenes, the girls are portrayed as the girl-next-door and could be anybody's daughter, sister, girlfriend, or wife. In the past, pornography has chosen to separate stereotypical females into two very distinct and polar-opposite groups – a dichotomy known as the Madonna-Whore Complex. The perception is that all females fall into one of these categories, but never into both. Pornographers have used this tactic to dehumanize the women that appear in their SEIM, allowing the user to believe them to be 'other' or 'less-than' the women he crosses paths with in the real world. The presentation of amateurs in SEIM is not an accident; it has become increasingly popular alongside other social media because users need to believe the fantasy can become real. In the same way that Internet users care about Instagram influencers, SEIM consumers care that they could approach a stranger and convince her to have sex with him. It is perhaps the most fantastical aspect of the portrayal of women in SEIM. In reality, on the other hand, the girls appearing in SEIM are anything but amateur. They are handpicked by producers in the same way that

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[63] In this case, the viewer believes the sexual acts are consensual and the inequality natural, a dangerous combination since he then goes out into the world treating all women as subordinate to him (Dyzenhaus, 1992). Therefore the inequality and violence are connected to sexuality and sexual arousal, reinforcing those ideas.

traffickers select their victims; often these two groups of women are actually one in the same (Burke, 2018).[64] Over 88% of surveyed sex workers reported a strong desire to leave the sex industry (Hunt, 2013).

According to the United States' Department of State, the Internet has exacerbated human trafficking in the past twenty years on both sides of the coin. Traffickers are not only able to solicit 'johns' using websites such as Craigslist and Backpage,[65] but they are also able to recruit and lure victims into their clutches. Using clever guises of romantic relationships, employment opportunities, or exciting travel, these digital pimps find vulnerable girls and subject them into the industries of forced labor or the sex trade (US State Dept, 2019). These trafficking victims end up 'starring' in countless videos on websites like Youporn or Pornhub,[66] or live-streaming on camming sites like MyFreeCams or Chaturbate. These women enter a cycle of victimhood because they are abused by their pimps and then again by the johns, physically in person, or psychologically while online.[67] In fact, between 2010 and 2015, the *National Center for Missing and Exploited Children* reported an increase of 84% of suspected child sex trafficking which directly correlated to the use of the Internet to sell these children (Jackman, 2017), of which, as many as

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[64] For example, a teenage girl in a former Soviet Bloc country is recruited by a pornographer to move to cities in Western Europe like Berlin, Paris, or Amsterdam. The girl is then set up in a small studio with a bed, a computer, and a webcam to become a digital stripper, also known as a cam-girl, who works exclusively in SEIM chatrooms, where thousands of users can join and tip her to do sexual things to herself while they watch and masturbate. When the girl becomes popular, or cannot make enough money for her pimp in these rooms, she is prostituted in person to paying users for actual sex in her current city. Some are plied with drugs and alcohol and become addicts. On occasion, these cam models 'graduate' to full-fledged pornography production by having sexual intercourse on camera, the images of which are then uploaded to a variety of SEIM websites for further consumption by pornography users. These girls are recruited young, trapped in the sex trade through substances, force, and coercion, and then end up prostitutes or porn stars (Paul, 2005).

[65] Backpage.com has since been seized by the U.S. Government for further investigation after a successful class-action lawsuit by some of the victims in United States v. Lacey. In the victim summaries, #5 was only 14 years old when her customers forced her to perform sexual acts at gunpoint, gang-raped her, and choked her to the point of seizures; #8's uncle advertised her on the site as 'fetish-friendly,' and #6 was stabbed to death by a client (Biederman, 2019).

[66] The multinational corporation, MindGeek, owns a near-monopoly on pornographic streaming sites like Pornhub, including: Youporn, Redtube, Gaytube, Tube8, as well as other studios such as Brazzers, Digital Playground, Reality Kings, and Twistys. As a side note, it is telling to see how a single corporate entity can have so much influence over such a large percentage of the population through their media holdings.

[67] Sexual assaults are underreported among regular women, let alone women trapped in the sex trade. Of assault against sex workers, prostitutes have reported that 86% have experienced some form of physical violence, 80% were raped, 65% of assaults involved weapons, 40% of rapes involved sadistic acts, and 60% reported one or more of the following: videotaping, robbery kidnapping, stalking, or property destruction (Hodge, 2008).

300,000 per year are trafficked from and around the United States (Hunt, 2013). Prostitution and pornography are the same thing, one is filmed, the other may not be; however, both involve profiting off of the sale of women's sexuality and their bodies. The motivation for the entire sex trade is profit: traffickers profit financially, users and clients profit through sexual pleasure and gratification (Burke, 2018). Both of these groups subjugate the women and girls who become victims of the industry and the patriarchal culture[68] in general.

The current trends in SEIM negatively impact multiple demographic groups including young males (users), women appearing in the media images (victims of trafficking), women and young girls that engage with the male users (victims of abuse, assault, and sexual micro-aggressions) (Dyzenhaus, 1992). A recent report by the American Psychological Association (APA, 2007) stated that the:

> *"pernicious effect of constant exposure to sexualized images of girls is that individuals and society may be trained to perceive and label sexualized girls as seductive. These images contribute to trafficking and prostitution of girls by creating a market for sex with children through the cultivation of new desires and experiences. If the idealized sexual partner is fifteen, male consumers may demand porn featuring such girls and the opportunities to pay for sex with them."*

We have already explored how SEIM affects consumers and the individual female victims of trafficking. As the APA correctly notes, a third group that is negatively impacted are the millions of young girls who become sexualized and objectified as a result of traditional male habits. Many authors and scholars have already demonstrated a hyper-sexualization of girls in our culture (Coy et al., 2007; Dines, 2010; Herbert, 2002; Hlavka, 2014; Levin, 2008; Paul, 2005; Peter & Valkenburg, 2009; Sun et al., 2016; Vandenbosch, 2015; Whisnant, 2004). There are direct results of the mainstreaming of SEIM in our society, but there are also indirect results. Pornography, particularly the way in which the women appearing in the media are depicted and treated by the males, functions like a form of propaganda that advocates for masculine domination of the feminine (an argument that pornographers may or may not disagree with),

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[68] Violence is primarily a male problem in a patriarchal society; there is a nine to one ratio of male to female arrests for violent crime in the United States (Russell, 1980).

working to mold and maintain that social structure that tolerates and even condones[69] violence against

women (Hoffman, 1985; LaBelle, 1980). The message of rape in pornography is that women need to know

their place, in the same way that the message of lynchings was to keep Blacks in their place (Morgan,

1980). Boys learn how to treat their female peers and sexual partners through their exposure to SEIM and

girls learn how to look, act, and tolerate the boys who are already overly objectifying and sexualizing

them.[70] Girls are conditioned to be the victims of masculine aggression in the same way that the boys are

conditioned to view their internal anger and domination as an evolutionary aspect of nature (Belknap,

1996).[71] According to the Daily Hassle Scale,[72] the sexual aggression that girls have to deal with from their

male peers ranges from verbal micro-aggressions to persistent coercion to send nudes via text messages

and continuing all the way up to sexual assault (R. DiClemente, personal communication, 7/7/2020).[73]

Girls increasingly describe these types of behaviors as normal stuff that guys do; these acts are tolerated

through silent consent when things 'just happen' (Hlavka, 2014),[74] and they are aware that sexuality is a

double-standard oftentimes self-blaming after becoming the victim of male sexual aggression (Nelson &

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[69] 67% of men and 49% of women polled in one study believe that pornography is acceptable; nine out of ten men reported using it (Carroll et al., 2008).

[70] Girls in the real world internalize the male gaze and then engage in their own self-objectification, wrongly assuming it will lead to liberation or empowerment (Levy, 2005); the strongest effects were found in the socio-cultural appearance ideals, including thinness, according to one meta-analysis of research (Grabe et al., 2008).

[71] Adjacent to the scope of this paper is the concept of homophobia in the same group of hyper-masculine men. These males are aggressive toward women and men who behave like women for the same reason; the behavior comes from the same place inside themselves: the fear of not being a real man. On the playground, the greatest insult that one boy can give another is to call him a girl. Roger Horrocks said, "The hatred of women connects with a hatred of the inner feminine in men – both must be crushed for men to be 'men'," (Herbert, 2002).

[72] Verbal harassment includes unwanted sexual humor, rumors, inappropriate sexual name calling, judging/rating body parts, pressure to perform sexual acts, and homophobia; Physical harassment includes brushing against or groping somebody, tugging on clothes in a sexual manner, unwanted sexual touching, and forced kissing/touching (Conroy, 2013).

[73] Authors Lewis and Clark concluded from their research that, "all men are shaped by social conditioning... and they are all sexually coercive to some degree," (Russell, 1980).

[74] In one study, nine out of ten girls between 15-17 years of age reported being pressured to have sex and six out of ten who engaged in sex before the age of 15 reported that it was involuntary and without consent (Levin, 2008). In another, 34% of boys reported having pressured a girl for sex, 17% of which – approximately half – used the word 'force' themselves (Stanley et al., 2016). Finally, Sara Thomas reported in her conversations with young women about nude selfies, 67% of them, in over 101 instances, described the boys in their lives as deploying multiple tactics to gain access to digital nude photos, including pressure, coercion, and threats (Thomas, 2017).

Oliver, 1998). Girls have to put up with hyper-masculine behaviors and attitudes more and more as SEIM

becomes accepted and its use widespread. A teenager might be raped by an older boy from school and

then, to add insult to injury, is labeled a 'slut,' which brings her more sexual aggression from boys and

ostracization from girls; others deal with chronic harassment they refer to as 'little rapes,' when forced to

perform sexually through coercion or threats of additional violence if they do not comply (Phillips, 2000).

Boys get angry at the girls when they try to tell them 'no,' because the women in the pornography they

watch never say no, the males do not experience any semblance of rejection in the media. Exposure to

SEIM increases the acceptance of these behaviors on behalf of the boy offenders and the girls being

harassed (Bonino, et al., 2006).

When the women in SEIM are dehumanized and treated as less-than,[75] the message the users

receive is that all girls and women in their social circles want and will respond positively to the same type

of treatment. One study that compared scenes in mainstream heterosexual pornography found that 88%

contained one or more acts of physical aggression (spanking, slapping, gagging, etc.), 48% contained one

or more acts of verbal aggression (name-calling terms like 'bitch' or 'slut') for an average amount of twelve

acts of aggression against women per scene (Dines, 2010). The eroticization of violence against women,

normalized through over-exposure to SEIM, changes the neural pathways in the consumers' brains,

leading them into stronger beliefs regarding gender-inequality. For instance, one British survey concluded

that 16% of men would commit rape if they could be assured they would not be caught, 37% admitted to

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[75] The process of dehumanization is interesting to note and related to the scope of this article. Victims are reduced through actual or symbolic violence, to a status of object with their bodies being emptied of any traces of that which makes them human or gives them humanity (Oliver, 2011). The victims, in this case, women, are presented as disgusting beings that pollute the world in order to evoke fear deep within the male consumers (Smith, 2011). Similar to times of war, dehumanization is a tactic that helps one group of people overcome an aversion to commit violent harm to another group. Consider how Nazis have been portrayed in war propaganda and subsequent Hollywood depictions for entertainment purposes (Steven Spielberg has bankrolled most of his career out of vilifying the swastika). Joseph Goebbels said, "The best propaganda is that which works invisibly, penetrates the whole of life without the public having any knowledge at all of the propagandist initiative," (LaBelle, 1980). There have been multiple studies that illustrate how frequent porn users are more likely to objectify and dehumanize others and support violence against women (Mikorski & Szymanski, 2017; Rostad et al., 2019; Wright & Tokunaga, 2016; Zhou et al., 2021).

tricking a woman into sex, and 31% felt that the women in their lives gave them a 'raw deal' (Farley et al., 2010).[76]

The takeaway is that SEIM negatively impacts the individual users, the individuals in the media images, both genders and society in general. Since 2016, seventeen states have declared pornography a public health crisis for just this reason. Similar to cigarettes and alcohol, pornography is considered a demerit good – a product whose consumption is considered unhealthy, degrading, or socially undesirable, and if left to the market, it will be over-consumed; but there is also a negative externality[77] toward women that is an even worse consequence (Pulsipher, 1971). Furthermore, the oppression paradigm's central tenet is that the sex trade relies on gender-based structural inequalities: if women had the same socio-economic opportunities as men, they would no longer be compelled to sell their sexuality or their bodies (Pateman, 1988). Most scholars agree that prohibition will not work, such a move will only force producers and traffickers further underground to the deep web; a move that may save some women, but not all, and will continuously reinforce gender-inequality in western civilization. How has such a damaging form of communication survived and thrived?

Crime and Policies

The United States Courts have had only a mere handful of run-ins with the pornography industry in the past fifty years and in those exchanges, have not managed to offer much insight on the subject:

1. *Miller v. California*, 413 U.S. 15 (1973) – Established the test used to determine obscenity with regard to First Amendment protections

2. *American Booksellers, Ass. v. Hudnut*, 771 F.2d. 323 (7th Cir. 1985) – Declared an Indianapolis anti-pornography ordinance unconstitutional

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[76] In that same study, 51% of the surveyed men reported using Internet pornography multiple times per week.

[77] A negative externality is any cost suffered by any third party of an economic transaction. In this case, the harm done to women through the transaction of prostitution and pornography (an economic transaction between the digital pimps and the Internet-johns), specifically any sex trafficking victims, is a direct cost suffered because of the sex industry.

3. *Pope v. Illinois*, 481 U.S. 497 (1987) – Confirmed a higher standard of review for 'obscenity' based on reasonable person and not contemporary community standards

4. *Reno v. ACLU*, 521 U.S. 844 (1997) – Ruled that the Communications Decency Act provisions that dealt with anti-indecency violated the First Amendment

These four cases dealt primarily with the matter of obscene materials and struggled to rule on a universal definition of what constitutes obscenity, since obscenity is not protected by the First Amendment. The pornography industry seized the opportunity presented by these cases in developing anti-censorship or freedom of speech[78] arguments to continue producing SEIM. Liberals, in response, have been blinded by First Amendment fundamentalism as they deregulate the digital marketplace and give state protection to pimps (Stoltenberg, 1995). The fact that nobody can come up with a better definition for obscenity or pornography than Justice Potter Stewarts' 1964 comment that he will, "know it when I see it," is what is known as a definitional dodge (Jensen, 2007). It is certainly worth noting that in *American Booksellers Ass. v Hudnut*, the court determined that, "Depictions of subordination tend to perpetuate subordination," thus agreeing with the Plaintiff's perspective even though they ruled in favor of the First Amendment. The court went on to say:

> *Porn is central in creating and maintaining sex as a basis of discrimination and is a systematic practice of exploitation and subordination based on sex which differentially harms women. The bigotry and contempt it produces, with the acts of aggression it fosters, harm women's opportunities for equality and rights of all kinds.*

So while the court continued to uphold the ideas of freedom of speech, they recognized the damage that pornography causes to individual women and society – they even used the word 'harm.' Prior to the Internet, adult material was not censored, but they were not widely available either. Since the introduction of this material online, though, every man, woman, and child with a WIFI connection and a smartphone has access to whatever they can find. That is a situation that the courts have never had to

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[78] The Free Speech Coalition is a "non-profit" lobbyist group run by producers of pornography to keep government regulation out of the sex industry.

deal with before. Some scholars have unsuccessfully argued that the pornography debate should not be

about censorship or free speech, but should instead be centered on the violence to half of the population

that could occur as a result of a pornified culture (Waltman, 2010). The so-called 'speech' present in

pornography is actually a product of crimes against women and leads to gender discrimination throughout

society (MacKinnon, 2005). Of course, these four court cases are not the only ones that warrant

discussion. There are other cases that need to be discussed with regard to how they either relate to, or

could potentially relate to, SEIM:

1. *Brandenburg v. Ohio*, 395 U.S. 444 (1969) – Held that the government cannot punish inflammatory speech unless it is likely to produce imminent lawless action

2. *Whitney v. California,* 274 U.S. 357 (1927) – Justified the state's power to punish speech that undermines public welfare by inciting criminal activity or disturbing the peace

3. *Chaplinsky v. New Hampshire*, 315 U.S. 568 (1942) – Formulated the fighting words doctrine: lewd and obscene, insulting or fighting… to inflict injury or tend to incite an immediate breach of the peace… [and are] no essential part of any exposition of ideas… outweighed by the social interest in order and morality

4. *Beauharnais v. Illinois*, 343 U.S. 250 (1952) – Maintained the illegality of publishing portrayals of depravity, criminality, unchastity, or lack of virtue of a class of citizens of any race, creed, color, or religion, providing a legal basis for hate speech

5. *Ashcroft v. ACLU,* 535 U.S. 564 (2002) – Determined that children may discover online pornographic material deliberately or accidentally

The cumulative implication of the aforementioned court decisions is that speech is subjective and

while some may consider it to be harmful, inciting, or even obscene, the First Amendment protects most

speech unless it can be proven to cause immediate danger to others. According to John Stuart Mill's Harm

Principle, people should be free to do almost whatever they want, excepting in the instance where their

actions bring harm to others (Dyzenhaus, 1992). The challenge to regulate the freedom of speech for one

group is to no longer make the case against speech or the First Amendment, but to change the approach

to be about civil inequality (Watson, 2007). This would require a judicial body (on one level or another) to

identify pornography, not as a type of speech warranting protection by the First Amendment, but instead

as a violation of constitutionally sanctioned equality (Waltman, 2010). Essentially, a successful rebuttal to the pro-pornography lobby's censorship debate could state that whenever any practice(s), including media messages, that systematically creates and/or reinforces the domination of one group over another, then regulation is not only justifiable but necessary, despite enacting limited censorship. Furthermore, if any effects of that speech could be considered more harmful to a group (subordinate) than the censorship of that speech would do another (dominant), then the speech should be deemed unworthy of First Amendment protections. The freedoms of one group should not directly, or indirectly lead to the silencing of another group (Lawrence, 1995). The general public need to agree on certain rules, enforced by their elected government, so that the order, safety, and peace of a civilized society does not break down into chaos and anarchy. This is commonly referred to as *social contract* and comes in the form of any tradeoffs or sacrifices to freedom that individuals make in return for the services they receive from their governing body.

Some of the men who influenced the early Americans in the quest for independence – men like Hobbes, Locke, Kant, and Rousseau – determined that politics should work to unify a diverse group of people under the same unbiased and impartial banner of justice (Gaus, 2015). John Rawls, in his *A Theory of Justice*, developed the ideas of political liberalism and public reason that sought to find a shared moral framework that everyone could agree to live with even if it possibly went against their private judgment (Rawls, 1999b).[79] The bottom line is that Rawls wanted political decisions and procedures in government to be guided by a common sense of fairness that is often absent. According to Rawls, disagreements will always occur, so a cooperative society requires them to submit to 'public reason' in which an impartial

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[79] Amartya Sen took this concept a step further in his 2009 book, *The Idea of Justice*, with the explanation of Niti and Nyaya and Matsyanyaya. Niti is the term for universal laws that exist in nature and across time and space, essentially what should be. Nyaya is the term for the outcomes that matter the most to us in the present, basically the limits of politics and social contracts, or what can be. Sen argues that Nyaya is reasonable and acceptable, provided that society does not devolve into Matsyanyaya, or the justice of the fish: the biggest fish can eat the little fish without any negative consequences to them. Matsyanyaya should be avoided at all costs (Sen, 2009).

justice will consider every claim, none of which will be denied without a reason (Rawls, 1999a). In his characterization, all citizens are free and equal. But feminists, such as Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon, have claimed that women experience the harms associated with civil *in*equality because of a culture of systemic masculine domination, as illustrated by the presence of the sex industry and pornography. Rawls' political liberalism exists to attempt to undo social hierarchies – dominant and subordinate groups – that, "serve to undermine reciprocity among citizens – gender is one such hierarchy," (Watson, 2007). People, and society, have wrongfully understood that what it means to be a man and what it means to be a women, biologically, are exactly the same as what it means to be a man and woman socially. Manliness is a duty that is created and maintained, and must be validated by, other men (Bourdieu, 2001). Feminists' point is that while women are citizens, they are not always recognized as equals[80] to men; therefore, any ubiquitous inequality that then exists in society harms women in discriminatory ways (MacKinnon, 2001). For public reason to succeed, citizens must be willing to consider the reasons of others, which may necessitate someone to change prior ideas and assumptions (Watson). Most men would have a difficult time comprehending living in a socially subjugated position, below another group, yet to hyper-masculine males,[81] women should be accepting and desiring of this position, as evidenced by the messages present in SEIM. The dominant group would never stand for a subordinate group to be in charge; the oppressive system makes such domination appear natural to both groups (Jensen, 2007), a belief that is represented in the sexualization of male domination found in SEIM. Pornography, then, interferes with women's abilities to become politically equal citizens with men. Their gender, as a socially-constructed concept, forces them into a subordinate role. SEIM persuades

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[80] Equality as stated in these arguments is a political value as opposed to more traditional understandings to equality. Women can only be equal to men if and when the government treats them with the same concern and respect with which it treats men (Watson). Overall, gender equality is not an unreasonable concept.

[81] In his book, *The Moral Sense*, James Q. called this species of man Homo Heirarchicus: anyone hell-bent on rising to the top and stepping on anyone else that threatens his top position. This domination is not a natural construct, it is social in nature (Wilson, 1993).

consumers, who are mostly male, that the women appearing in the media, as exemplars for all women, enjoy and desire sexual assault.[82] This belief impacts actions, which may lead to direct harm toward women; any argument about censorship should never outweigh those harms, or even potential harms, SEIM commits against women individually and as a protected group (Kang, 2008). In fact, that free speech being exercised by digital pimps endorses violent misogyny and prevents women from being free and equal citizens (Butler, 1995).

Pornography does more harm to women and girls than political equality and social hierarchy however; the harms that occur against women are tangible (physical, emotional, financial). As already discussed, the media effects of violence (in certain people with specific environmental factors, but a large enough percentage of the population to be concerning) lead consumers to think and act in violent ways. Priming Theory applies to short-term and Desensitization applies to long-term. Therefore, with enough exposure to messages of violence toward women, there are men who will maintain attitudes of gender stereotypes and behaviors of aggression after being conditioned from SEIM and other violent media material. When a pornography user witnesses women being sexually assaulted over and over again, those actions will become normalized in his brain patterns. If he then goes out into the real world and commits sexual assault, the logical conclusion is that the free speech of the pornographers incited that consumer to directly commit an act of gender-based violence. When does free speech become hate speech? The First Amendment protects the public from having beliefs, even those substantially unpopulated by the majority of the population. It is what the citizens do about those beliefs that matters – when ideas are turned into actions. The Department of Justice defines two specific criteria that must be met for a crime to become categorized as a hate crime. The first, obviously, is a crime – which could be domestic violence,

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[82] Does the average 21st century American male need to be reminded that nobody would ever seek out or enjoy being raped? Apparently so, since most women appearing in SEIM are portrayed as carnal, submissive, promiscuous, whore-victims, and repeatedly conquered by the worshipped penis (LaBelle, 1980). When men are able to see women enjoy pain – via SEIM – that concept alleviates any guilt a rapist may feel toward his victim after sexually assaulting her (Russell, 1980).

sexual assault, or child molestation. The second, is an inherent bias against a particular group that motivates the criminal act. As an example that pertains to the topic of this article, if a man were to develop beliefs about traditional gender roles and the way women should be treated by men, and then that same man were to go out and commit an act of sexual aggression against a woman because of those beliefs, then that crime would fit the Justice Department's definition of a hate crime. Therefore, in order to regulate the pornography industry, the policy makers need to focus less on the concept of free speech and more on the concept of hate speech. The type of normalization of gender-based bias and attitudes that is reinforced through repeat viewing of SEIM, fosters and perpetuates gender inequality and violence against women because they are women.

Parallel to the timeline of the explosion of high-speed broadband, between 2000 and 2009, the number of arrests in the United States for Internet-based sex crimes tripled (Wolak et al., 2009).[83] In a rape-culture,[84] men sexually assault women because they see them as rape-able objects (many men do not truly comprehend that without consent, any time sexual intercourse occurs it is rape[85]), and the reasons behind the perception of rape-ability returns to the socially learned media effect from SEIM (Gadd & Jefferson, 2007). Where is it learned? Pornography is the theory, rape is the practice (Morgan, 1980). Scholars have interviewed convicted and incarcerated rapists while in prison and a large percentage referred directly to their prior pornography use; these men also vehemently believed and insisted that their female victims enjoyed being raped (Silbert & Pines, 1984; Paul, 2005).[86] The cultural traditions that

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[83] While some may question claims of a direct link of causation between exposure to pornography and violent crimes, SEIM has never been linked to the opposite effect: a reduction in sexual assault rates (Bensimon, 2007).

[84] Becoming a rape-culture is not instantaneous and often takes multiple generations to achieve. America is a rape-culture because women are conditioned to fear men and become victims while men are conditioned to dominate women; these messages, also found in SEIM, are passed down from fathers to sons and mothers to daughters (Gadd & Jefferson, 2007).

[85] (Morgan, 1980)

[86] The belief that women want and deserve to be sexually assaulted is mirrored through the SEIM that is mainstream when the trafficking victims appearing in the media images literally beg to be abused, degraded, humiliated, and physically injured. SEIM makes the abuse and inequality more subversive since any non-consent, objections, crying, fear, and other typical female responses to being forced and coerced to engage in sexual intercourse are hidden behind the cameras (Waltman, 2010). 177 female porn stars participated in an anonymous survey at the Adult

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link interpersonal aggression and sexuality in hyper-masculine American men create a dangerous existence for all women (Ellis, 1989); these traditions are easily learned by men who are encouraged to be competitive and aggressive, which in turn makes them socially oppressive to women in order to subdue and keep them subordinate (Mullender, 2000).

Children are more susceptible to outside influences than adults. SEIM, then, has the potential for greater media effects on youthful Internet users than it would on a consumer who has already established their sexual scripts. Four separate studies, among others, have consistently shown that adolescents' pornography usage is related to stronger gender-stereotypical beliefs (Brown & L'Engle, 2009; Peter & Valkenburg, 2007; Peter & Valkenburg, 2009; To et al., 2012).[87] Criminal-level sex offenses are the worst results of early exposure to frequent SEIM, but it lies at the far end of the spectrum. Before discussing juvenile delinquent behavior, one must first consider socially inappropriate attitudes and behaviors that fall short of criminality. For example, adolescents who committed sexual harassment against females in their peer group reported using sexually-explicit Internet material; and the same longitudinal study suggests that boys have a stronger relationship between pornography usage and sexual aggressive behaviors and attitudes (Brown & L'Engle). Youthful Internet users are have also demonstrated a higher likelihood of imitating the actions they see in SEIM – as well as how to behave before, during, and after – than older adults would (Lavoie et al., 2000; Rothman et al., 2015).

Statistics gathered from the State of Alaska Department of Juvenile Justice illustrate the longitudinal changes in juvenile sex offenders. In 2002, before widespread broadband Internet access, the total number of juvenile sex offenders in the state registry was 64, but the very next year, after broadband, that number skyrocketed to 231 (and since then has remained between 143 and 241 (B. Whitman,

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Industry medical Healthcare Foundation in Los Angeles, to verify the damaged goods hypothesis, by answering a series of questions about their professional experiences and their background (against a matched sample); according to the results of that data, actresses in porn were younger during their first sexual experience, had far more sexual partners in life, and used substantially more controlled substances than the matched sample (Griffith et al., 2013).
[87] Gender-stereotypical beliefs can come from many sources such as parents, peers, and pornography.

personal communication, 9/22/2020). The number of charged juveniles for sexual assaults likewise

jumped from 48 in 2002 to 131 in 2003, peaking again in 2013 at 121 (Whitman).[88] While pornography

use was not specifically tabulated in the DJJ's statistics, Malamuth et al., (2000) demonstrated a strong

correlation between mean sexual aggression and frequency of pornography use in a confluence model

(but only using sexually-explicit magazines, and not the Internet). By combining the data from these two

groups of statistics, it becomes evident that the rise in juvenile sex offenders should dovetail with frequent

use of SEIM.[89] Additionally a meta-analysis study (mentioned earlier) demonstrated that adolescent sex

offenders were more likely to have, as well as reported having, more frequent and earlier exposure to

SEIM (Seto & Lalumiere, 2010). A national table of the characteristics of juvenile sex offenders further

illustrated that offenders under the age of twelve and over the age of twelve, who victimize other minors,

have similarities and parallels. For instance, the victims identified as acquaintances of the offenders (56%

under 12 and 64.5% over 12, the abuse occurred in a private residence (73% under 12 and 68% over 12),

the abuse occurred in the afternoon, between noon and 6:00 PM (45.6% under 12 and 42.5% over 12),

and the vast majority of victims were female (63.4% under 12 and 80% over 12) (U.S. Department of

Justice, 2004). These numbers suggest that sexual abuses of minors, perpetuated by juvenile sex offenders

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[88] Juvenile Justice utilizes one of two assessments to determine an offender's risk of re-offending: J-SOAP-II and ERASOR (Juvenile Sex Offender Assessment Protocol II and Estimate of Risk of Adolescent Sexual Offense Recidivism respectively). Both assessments go into detail regarding the subject's exposure and use of sexually-explicit material as a cause of past offenses and a predictor of future offenses. Item 6 in J-SOAP-II captures the degree of aggression in the sexual offense and item 7 measures the subject's preoccupation with sexuality that includes chronic use of SEIM and compulsive masturbation (Prentky & Righthand, 2003). The ERASOR has similar categories but in more detail: 1. Deviant sexual interests – measuring sexual arousal of violence, 2. Preoccupation – demonstrating obsessive sexual interests and compulsive masturbation, 3. Attitudes supportive of sexual offending – measures overall belief in victim-blaming or the innocence and harmlessness of sexual assaults, and 8. Use of violence during the offense – measures how much verbal and physical injury occurred (Worling & Curwen, 2001). According to personal communication with juvenile sexual risk assessors in Fairbanks, an unnamed 14-year-old subject was discovered to be at a HIGH risk for re-offending because of factors that included being sexually aroused to children and images of children, preoccupation of sexual thoughts, compulsive masturbation, frequent sexual comments to female peers, frequent use of SEIM, using sexual chatrooms online with adults, using sexuality to cope with negative emotional states, and a high-stress (unknown details) family environment.

[89] Unfortunately, data of this type is hard to find due to ethical concerns regarding questioning juveniles about sexually-explicit material usage – it is an area for future research to prove correlation.

mostly occur in unsupervised homes, after school, before parents return home from work, and mostly involve the female friends of younger siblings. In the case(s) of offenders twelve years of age and older, 38.3% of offenses are rape (vaginally or anally) while 47.2% could be classified as fondling.[90] This suggests that teenage offenders engage in full sexually assaultive penetration with their victims over one third of the time, while the other offenses may or may not be 'attempted' rape.[91] In over 90% of reported sex offensives, the actions were considered forcible and therefore without consent. Where are the sexually abusive behaviors of juvenile offenders learned: parents, friends, media, or all of the above? Proving direct causation is nearly impossible as the factors exist in a complex web of environmental factors and psychological differences between sex offenders.

Constitutional violations of the First Amendment that occur online are frequently difficult to prosecute since many users hide behind the anonymity of usernames. The ability to keep their identities private leads many Internet users to engage in uncivilized behavior and communication that they would be reticent to do in the real world and relieves a formerly reasonable person of the consequences of accountability (Branscomb, 1995)[92]. Much has been said in the past few years about extremism appearing en masse online, most of which is protected by the First Amendment, but the private sector is not bound by the same constraints – and much of the online communities are hosted by private corporations (Greenberg, 2016). In the same manner in which discussions have led organizations to consider counter-radicalization of extremist groups on the Internet, the extreme nature of the violence against women regularly appearing in digital media should be counter-radicalized. For decades, broadcast media fell under the ownership realm of public trust, and could therefore be regulated by the Federal

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[90] In the under 12 group, the overwhelming category of offenses were reported as fondling at 61.3%.

[91] The outcomes of these offenses was not reported in the FBI table and it remains unclear if the offender was content to stop at fondling or if the victim was able to escape or fend off her attacker in some manner.

[92] Users are much more negative and abusive with their communication when there is no way for average people to trace the offensive words back to them. Section 230 of the CDA prevents plaintiffs from bringing civil litigation against the hosts of the spaces those communications were posted.

Communications Commission (Cannon, 2004); but the broadcast spectrum was never as prevalent or invasive into our lives and our culture as the Internet has become. So why has the government not stepped in, declared broadband WIFI part of the public trust, and then worked to regulate its content? Traditionally, the State prefers to keep out of First Amendment issues, allowing the public and the market to dictate what is appropriate. However, when the messages and content are part of a corporate commercial mass media machine, the primary motivations behind the types of distributed media messages is financial and not democratic (Kenyon, 2014). Multimedia producers, of pornography as well as other forms of media, want their messages to appeal to the audience that will be buying and consuming the media and do not care for the segment of the population that is outside their primary audience in the first place (in the case of pornographers, they will listen to consumer feedback from men, and ignore that from women, since it is men – and not women – that are funneling money into their pockets). This may appeal to capitalists, but not to political liberalists (the future, it seems, belongs to the marketers and advertisers – Turow, 2011). For debate to flourish outside commercial markets,[93] the contributions of diverse voices are required in order to create a pure democratic society (Kenyon), and without positive free speech regulation on behalf of the government, only the majority voices will be granted that constitutional right. The 'leave-me-out-of-it' approach the federal government has adopted over the past seventy-five years needs to be corrected to ensure that the voices of protected groups benefit from the same First Amendment rights in the future that white men and corporations currently do.[94] If speech does not promote both anti-censorship and diversity of expression, it ceases to be truly free.

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[93] Indeed, the Internet is not exempt from the negative influences of corporate control, exploitation, manipulative rights, and market concentration (Curran et al., 2012).

[94] "The media are owned by a small number of magnates who allow little or no time or space for the expression of dissenting, let alone socialist views; this is not balanced by a strong public broadcasting system. The government, anxious not to offend these magnates, makes no effort to intervene," (Barendt, 2007).

DISCUSSION

Violence against women is an extensive dilemma in contemporary society irrespective of borders, nationalities, or ethnic backgrounds. While other issues of social discrimination exist (such as racism and hatred of out-groups for other reasons), in the majority of cultures, the males treat females as second-class citizens, either consciously or subconsciously; the fabric of this inequality is rooted in the patriarchal social systems that have evolved over thousands of years. In the United States, the same subjugation exists, albeit in much more subtle and unspoken ways. Women may not believe they are being victimized or have ever felt like a victim themselves. Some may insist that they are surrounded by modern males who would never dream of discriminatory treatment based on gender; others may even rage against the concept of general female victimhood. Sexism and misogyny, however, are more systemic to our way of life than racism. Pornography is one element of this pervasive rape-culture, and more importantly, it is one of the few aspects of masculine dominance that can actually be controlled through governmental intervention and regulation. But lawmakers need to insist upon action.

Specifically with regard to youthful Internet users exposed to SEIM, correlating absorbed messages in media images with deviant adolescent behavior may prove difficult to determine within the context of the complicated cognitive, emotional, and social changes that happen during that turbulent time in the lives of prepubescent and pubescent youth (Peter & Valkenburg, 2016). With the same care that parents and educators consider the best needs of raising emotionally healthy children, so too should the government and society consider their emotional health with regard to violent and sexually-violent media exposure. As previously established, men, women, and children are all harmed through the production and distribution of SEIM.

Existing laws, related to pornography, are not based on the recognition of harm, exploitation, or civil inequalities women experience, but are rather based on a vague and ethereal concept of obscenity (Waltman, 2010). Future, successful policies that seek to regulate the sex trade, thus helping the women

trapped in it and the men addicted to it, must be based on the hatred and harm of the female gender, and not on whether or not the images in the media can be considered offensive or obscene. In the past, feminists have convincingly stated that pornography exists within the context of social dominance for the express purpose of inspiring sexual coercion and assault (Waltman). One justification for the limitation of SEIM appeared in the book *Sex, Violence, and the Media* by researchers and scholars Hans Eysenck and D.K.B. Nias, which states:

> *"Where the context is hostile to women, as most pornographic films are, we feel that such films should fall under the category of incitement to violence towards minority groups – even though women are not a minority group. Nevertheless, such films do constitute a clear case of incitement to maltreat women, downgrade them to a lower status, regard them as mere sex objects, and elevate male machismo to a superior position in the scale of values… Such presentations have effects on men's attitudes which are detrimental to women; in fairness to more than one half of the population, such incitements should be proscribed."*

Solicitation to commit crimes, whether direct or indirect, is not permitted and both the federal government, and many states, have drafted and passed laws establishing such a legal precedent to hold purveyors of pornography, digital pimps, accountable for their role in the epidemic of violence against women. 18 U.S. Code 373 (*Solicitation to commit a crime of violence*) maintains that it is a felony level offense when somebody uses, attempts to use, or threatens to use physical force against another person in order to persuade that person to engage in conduct he or she would not otherwise freely choose to perform. Sexually-explicit Internet material contains messages of violence against women that normalize and desensitize users to depictions of violence, which in turn condition users' attitudes and behaviors, subsequently directly or indirectly grooming them to sexually harass, sexually assault, or commit acts of domestic violence against women as a result. In short, sexually-explicit Internet material incites hyper-masculine men to commit violent acts against women, reinforces traditional gender stereotypic ideals, and/or maintains masculine domination through aggression and competition. The results impact over 50% of the population, regardless of whether or not the victims are aware of such effects, albeit physical, emotional, psychological, or social. Even if a woman, in her entire adult life, has never experienced a

negative encounter with a hyper-masculine male, the fact remains that civil gender-inequality exists. According to the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment[95] women are part of a group protected against discrimination, including gender-based violence (Engle, 2006).

The validity of multiple theories related to how media messages can effect individual consumers and society as a whole has been discussed and demonstrated with consistency and efficacy. The historical context of limiting children's access to sexually-explicit and violent material has been made. Logic and reason dictates that a rational adult recognizes the need for limited censorship of these images on the Internet. How can such regulation be achieved with minimal harm to the constitutional rights of the citizenry? A precedent fortunately exists. In the past, the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) has worked alongside other independent bodies to enforce limited censorship and regulation to media industries. The Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) provides ratings for films; the National Association of Broadcasters and the Comics Code Authority, in previous decades, sought to hold writers, illustrators, and producers to the community standards of decency at the time. More recently, the Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act and the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act became law in 2018 (amended title: Allow States and Victims to Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act), providing an exception to the protections that Communications Decency Act (CDA) provided to corporations online, criminalizing and expanding liability to entities that host web content that facilitates sex trafficking. Unfortunately, the vagueness of the bill makes it unclear exactly what counts and what does not, so further amendments and clarifications will be needed, particularly to include SEIM production as part of the global problem of sex trafficking.

The current policies have done little to protect the women embroiled in the sex industry, even those who claim to have chosen it, nor have they done much to protect children from the hazards of online sex trafficking or exposure to sexually-explicit Internet material. Most of the pornography-centric

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[95] The Equal Protection Clause states that no State shall, "deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the law." However, women are not afforded the same protections as men.

policies are misdirected, focused on protecting First Amendment freedoms of speech and expression and limiting and obliterating any form of reasonable censorship. SEIM must be regarded as a civil inequality, bringing harm to an entire gender. More recently, the cannabis industry has faced many regulatory challenges from governmental bodies as it becomes increasingly legal state to state. These precedents can also be used by the digital media industry to regulate images of and supportive of hate crimes against females.

The first facet would be the funding of nationwide educational programs that explain the harms associated with the production and consumption of sexually-explicit Internet material to students of an age before the messages have been absorbed and normalized. Further rehabilitative programs for sex offenders after the sex discrimination has occurred, criminal or otherwise, regardless of their age could supplement and reinforce those concepts and ideas.

The second facet would be a policy that provides monetary tax breaks to media corporations that self-regulate the content they produce and distribute online, a financial incentive to produce healthy content with positive or uplifting results. On the other hand, companies that produce harmful content could be legally allowed to continue, though at their own expense through heavy fines in an effort to use policies to shift the paradigm from profits to community good.

The third facet (already in progress through some legislative efforts) would be to increase both punitive damages, in the case of civil suits, as well as criminal penalties to those players convicted of working directly with in the illegal industry of Internet sex trafficking and prostitution.[96] As soon as SEIM is recognized as incitement to violence against women, those images and messages would no longer be protected by the First Amendment, and therefore, could be prosecutable as discriminatory practices.

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[96] In Sweden, for example, the sex trafficking victims, while working as prostitutes, are not criminally prosecuted. It is the pimps, traffickers, and johns who are prosecuted (Tham, 2011).

The fourth facet, and perhaps most effective, would be the creation of a gated, adults-only Internet domain that segregates SEIM websites. Internet service providers could choose whether or not to offer that domain to consumers, who would then choose whether or not to opt-in, providing proof of age to the provider. For the vast majority of users, the adult domain would not be included in standard Internet connectivity. All of the adult-oriented sites, instead of having URL addresses like .com, .net, and .org, would be reclassified and moved to a gated section of the World Wide Web with .xxx. In this way, most users and providers would not need to worry about children being exposed to media images depicting violence against women, but would have to choose to allow such material onto their computers and handheld devices.

The final facet would be to encourage producers of sexually-explicit material to remove all forms of violence from their products: no violence or discrimination could appear in the media images themselves, but also no violence or discrimination would be allowed to occur toward the sex workers. All sex workers would fall under the umbrella protections of the Equal Protection Clause. Violent and abusive pornography could be phased out of the mainstream in favor of a more gender-equal version of adult sexually-explicit material (perhaps erotica) that empowers women and sexually arouses all consumers in healthier ways. Content matters.

The cannabis industry has set partial precedents in a few of these policy suggestions, as was previously mentioned (Kees et al., 2020). In addition to using moneys obtained from taxes and civil litigation of the adult media industry for educational programs, this revenue could be used to create programs to provide assistance to the sex workers themselves in the form of healthcare, protection from assaults while working, psychological services, and financial planning programs as well. These would all help to balance out any regulatory efforts. The most important takeaway from the cannabis industry is the distribution and marketing policies. While the advertising of cannabis has been strongly controlled, so too could the digital marketing of adult materials on the Internet. While the distribution should be limited

to gated Internet communities that minors cannot access, viewers who opt in for access should have to watch previews before the materials that explain the harms of the images they are about to watch. This is akin to the Surgeon General's warnings that appear on cigarette packaging.

CONCLUSION

The greatest potential for change lies with decreasing the demand in hyper-masculine men for paid access to women's bodies and sexuality; the glamorized pimps and porn stars need to be discouraged so that the harm of the sex industry becomes clear (Paul, 2005). Changing the fundamentals of a patriarchal society, however, will not be easy and cannot be relied on. The government needs to step up and step in with a handful of policies meant to curb sex trafficking, juvenile sex offenses (and adult sex offenses), and all other forms of violence against women, gender-based civil inequalities, and even homophobia and hate crimes against the LGBTQIA? Community. Margaret Mead said, "Today, children are not brought up by parents, they are brought up by the mass media." No media in the history of mankind has been more mass than the Internet. Most of the laws related to the regulation of the digital world are so old and outdated that the drafters and policy-makers could never have imagined the ways in which our culture has been shaped through the prevalence and reliance on the Internet. It is time for those outdated laws to be reworked and remodeled to protect women and children from the harms associated with hyper-masculinity and the digital pimps that train them to be abusers and sex offenders.
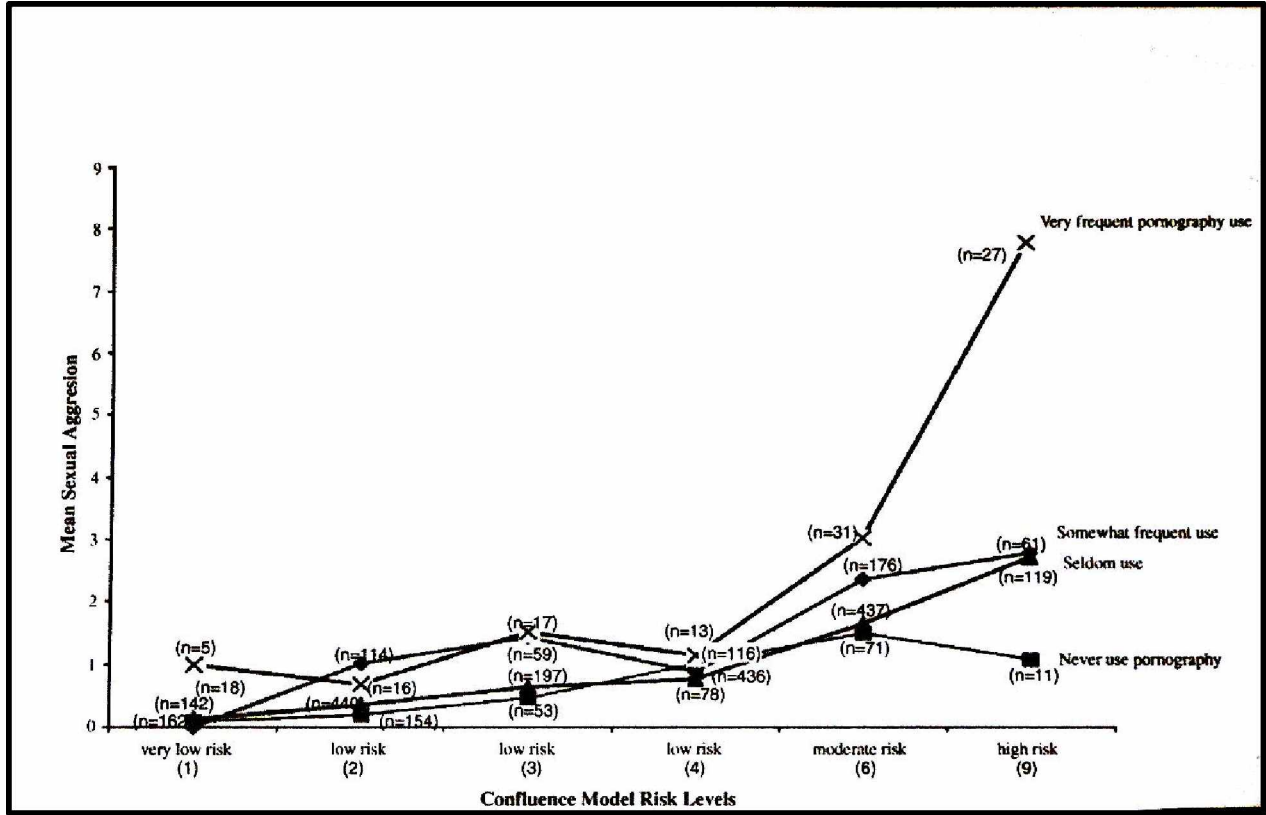
Fig. 1. Mean sexual aggression as a function of the confluence model's risk levels (ie, the cross-product of hostile masculinity and sexual promiscuity) and four levels of reported use of sexually explicit magazines (pornography use). Numbers in parentheses indicate the number of participants in each condition. (Malamuth et al., 2000).

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