

# An Inconspicuously Obvious Phenomenon: The Infiltration of Pornography into American Society

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An Inconspicuously Obvious Phenomenon:  
The Infiltration of Pornography into American Society

by

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*To Suzy Conway:*

*For agreeing to be my advisor when no one else would.*

*Without you none of this would have been possible.*

*Thank you.*

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## **Introduction**

In America today, porn is often considered a four-letter word. Its taboo nature makes it an unusual discussion topic within the public sphere. Although most people acknowledge the prevalence of porn consumption, they fail to grasp the ways that it has infiltrated myriad aspects of our everyday lives. In fact, many people believe that only those who use porn are truly affected by the porn industry and the culture it promotes. In reality, porn culture is firmly embedded in numerous aspects of mainstream society. This paper seeks to explore some of the facets of popular culture that are most affected by the normalization of pornographic material. In so doing, the consequences of a hyper-sexualized society for different populations of people are considered. The eight sections of this paper focus on either distinct societal features or specific demographics and the ways in which porn has influenced them. Each section offers a critical analysis of current issues and in some cases endeavors to predict what may happen if society continues down the path of pornification.

The first section examines the rise of Internet pornography and its influence on the development and popularization of porn subgenres. Undoubtedly Internet porn is consumed more than any other form of pornographic media simply because of the ease with which it can be accessed. It also allows for complete anonymity when viewing porn and therefore gives users the ability to create an alternate identity strictly for online use. The success of Internet porn is undeniable, and has led many profit-seeking corporations to look to the porn industry for ideas to help bolster their own financial success.

Section two further explores the notion of companies using pornographic images to sell products in America's capitalistic society. In advertisements in particular it is easy to see the influence of the porn industry. Frequently sexual images are used to catch the viewer's attention so that they will be sure to remember the product being sold. Other forms of mainstream media also draw on explicit imagery to improve their ratings and attract viewers. It is important to consider just how far these corporations are willing to go to in order to guarantee fiscal success.

Sections three and four address the effects of a hyper-sexualized society on both males and females. The consequences for each gender are different as porn is primarily aimed at men with the idea that women are sexual objects. However, it is quite feasible that individuals of both genders may experience decreased self-esteem as a result of porn culture's obsession with physical appearance. Pornography impacts both male and female sexuality in ways that can lead to serious problems within society.

The fifth section takes a critical look at the hookup culture on college campuses and how it has been influenced by the prevalence of pornographic material in everyday life. The expectations for college men and women within the hookup culture are very different. Therefore, the hookup culture perpetuates the sexual double standard that is widely accepted in society. Although the idea of opting out of the hookup culture seems like a feasible choice, it is often difficult in a social setting that is rooted in peer approval.

Section six investigates the recent *Fifty Shades Trilogy* phenomenon. With its overwhelming popularity and a movie version of the first book on the horizon, it is important to take a close look at how these books have further normalized pornography.

On a positive note, it has led to a recent surge in female sexual exploration. However, its popularity could have a negative impact on young readers who do not have the sexual maturity to understand the contents of the books.

Section seven considers the role of social media in today's hyper-sexualized society. The ability to communicate via pictures and videos has led to a dramatic change in the way people interact. Sending and receiving sexually explicit images through smartphone apps has become somewhat of a norm in today's high-tech world. By focusing on three such smartphone apps, the paper will illustrate how it is entirely possible to interact with others solely on the basis of physical appearance.

The eighth and final section scrutinizes three aspects of Boston College social life that directly play into the mainstreaming of porn culture. The occurrence of casual sex found on BC's campus is certainly not unique, and stems from society's habituation to the strictly physical relationships seen in porn. As Boston College students navigate their way through a social sphere that encourages superficial relationships, many find themselves longing for more. However, the fear of social isolation often keeps students from expressing their desire for truly intimate relationships.

In order to completely understand how the porn industry influences American society today, it is necessary to look back in history to where it all started. It is impossible to understand the present status of pornography in American society without first acknowledging what happened in the past. For the purposes of this paper, the history of pornography will start with the mass distribution of printed media and end with a focus on porn films.

During the American Civil War, many factors came together to mark the birth of the pornography industry in the United States. In the mid-1800s it became possible to “cheaply and quickly produce multiple prints of a photograph.”<sup>1</sup> Because of this technological advance, photographs of various types became important to soldiers. They often kept pictures of their loved ones in their pockets and also sent pictures of themselves in uniform home to relatives. Hidden away either somewhere on their person or in their sleeping quarters, many soldiers hid stereoscopic photographs of women in revealing clothing or seductive poses.

The sale and distribution of products featuring scantily clad women was propelled by the perfect market setup by the war. Though “young men may have been horny before the war,”<sup>2</sup> the wartime conditions led to their being grouped together by the thousands. For the first time these men and boys were separated from their wives and girlfriends back home. They were bored, and looked to various companies to supply them with the eye-candy they needed. G.S. Hoskins and Co. and Richards & Roche in New York City were two such companies that sent out flyers and catalogs detailing what they had to offer. The pages of these brochures advertised photographs of prostitutes and couples engaged in sex acts that could be bought in regular sizes or miniaturized versions that could be hidden inside everyday objects such as stickpins.<sup>3</sup> Along with photographs, erotic novels also became popular during the war. Cheap erotic novels

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<sup>1</sup> Sarracino, Carmine and Scott, Kevin M., *The Porning of America: The Rise of Porn Culture, What It Means, and Where We Go from Here* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2008), p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Sarracino & Scott, *The Porning of America*, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Sarracino & Scott, *The Porning of America*, p. 7.



aimed at soldiers were widely available in the United States and became known as “barrack favorites.”<sup>4</sup>

It is not hard to imagine why pornographic images and novels became popular among Civil War soldiers. Pornography provided an element of fantasy that many men need for masturbatory motivation. Therefore, these Civil War soldiers used their pictures and novels as a “safe, nonviolent means for sexual expression.”<sup>5</sup> Although catalogs upon catalogs were printed offering various pornographic items, only a few survived because commanders would often “clean up camp” by building bonfires to dispose of the obscene material.<sup>6</sup>

Shortly after the war ended, anti-masturbation and anti-pornography movements began in the United States led by Anthony Comstock and the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice. The Comstock Act of 1873 made it illegal to trade in “obscene literature and articles of immoral use.”<sup>7</sup> Comstock blamed many societal issues on pornography, but he focused strongly on its ability to encourage masturbation. This law had major effects on the United States Postal Service, as obscene material could not be sent via U.S. mail. These laws continued into the 1900s and caused problems for those trying to establish the predecessors of today’s pornographic magazines.

Ilseley Boone, a known advocator of organized social nudity, produced the first nudist magazine in the U.S., *The Nudist*, in 1933. The monthly magazine was intended to carry out the goals of Boone’s International Nudist Conference (INC). The magazine

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<sup>4</sup> Abramson, Paul R., and Pinkerton, Steven D., *With Pleasure: Thoughts on the Nature of Human Sexuality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 178.

<sup>5</sup> Abramson & Pinkerton, *With Pleasure*, p. 178.

<sup>6</sup> Sarracino & Scott, *The Porning of America*, p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> Sarracino & Scott, *The Porning of America*, p. 8.

sold at newsstands around the country, but was also distributed through the mail. The inaugural issue sold 10,000 copies and this number quickly jumped to 50,000 copies the following month.<sup>8</sup> The large number of copies sold illustrated that even those who did not really support the nudist movement were interested in the sexual displays found within the magazine. In order to promote the magazine's focus on health and recreation, rather than on obscene nude images, *The Nudist* changed its name to *Sunshine & Health* under the Sunshine Publishing Company.<sup>9</sup>

The editors of the magazine tried their best to keep images healthy and respectable in an effort to keep readers from feeling like they were buying explicit pornography. Despite their efforts, the United States Postal Service declared the magazine "obscene" and required that all pubic hair and genitalia be censored if they were to be processed by U.S. mail, citing the Comstock Act of 1873.<sup>10</sup> Boone tried to avoid censoring because it went against his nudist values and instead relied on posing models.

*Sunshine & Health* saw a huge increase in popularity during World War II. Again young men were taken away from their sweethearts and sought to relieve their sexual frustration by collecting pornographic images. To further attract the large market of American soldiers, the magazine changed its overall appearance to entice them. Instead of focusing on nature and recreation as the magazine had done in the past, *Sunshine & Health* turned towards images of topless women in suggestive poses.

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<sup>8</sup> Hoffman, Brian, "A Certain Amount of Prudishness: Nudist Magazines and the Liberalisation of American Obscenity Law, 1947-58" in *Historicising Gender and Sexuality* (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), p. 185.

<sup>9</sup> Hoffman, "A Certain Amount of Prudishness," p. 185.

<sup>10</sup> Hoffman, Brian. "A Certain Amount of Prudishness," p. 186.

However, the soldiers were able to maintain their respectability because *Sunshine & Health* was produced “under the guise of a health movement.”<sup>11</sup> Of interest to note is the fact that the magazine contained nude images of men and women, thereby allowing homosexual soldiers to flip through the pages without being identified.<sup>12</sup>

By the end of the war, *Sunshine & Health* had financial security and a significant enough public following to stop censoring images. However, the United States Postal Service was not happy with this decision and took the magazine to court for the distribution of “obscene” images. The judge who oversaw the trial declared that full frontal nudity, regardless of gender, qualified as “obscene” and should not be distributed through U.S. mail.<sup>13</sup> Almost three decades later, the U.S. Supreme Court again addressed the issue of obscenity in the *Roth vs. United States* case of 1957. In this instance the court ruled that the First Amendment does not protect against obscenity and that censorship should be limited to commercial representations of sex.<sup>14</sup> After hearing of this decision, Boone appealed his trial to the U.S. Supreme Court and the ruling was reversed on the grounds that the nudity found in *Sunshine & Health* did not constitute commercial sexual displays. This new ruling helped to redefine the boundaries of acceptable sexual display. Despite the magazine’s contribution to the growing acceptance of naked bodies in the public eye and its defeat of censorship laws across the nation, *Sunshine & Health* went bankrupt in 1963.<sup>15</sup> At this point many

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<sup>11</sup> Hoffman, Brian. "A Certain Amount of Prudishness," p. 188.

<sup>12</sup> Hoffman, Brian. "A Certain Amount of Prudishness," p. 189.

<sup>13</sup> Hoffman, Brian. "A Certain Amount of Prudishness," p. 195.

<sup>14</sup> Hoffman, Brian. "A Certain Amount of Prudishness," p. 201.

<sup>15</sup> Hoffman, Brian. "A Certain Amount of Prudishness," p. 203.

explicit sexual magazines had moved into the market and *Sunshine & Health* simply could not compete.

Without a doubt, Ilsley Boone's magazine paved the way for later versions of nude magazines that focused more on explicit sexual displays. The immersion of Hugh Hefner's *Playboy* Magazine in 1953 symbolized the start of porn becoming mainstream.<sup>16</sup> Before *Playboy*, porn was known for being poor-quality. It was "printed on cheap paper, featuring grainy photographs of prostitutes and their johns."<sup>17</sup> The prostitutes in these images were often alcoholics or drug-addicts who were taken advantage of by their pimps. The underground nature of the porn industry that dealt with images of this nature perpetuated the marginalization of both the men and women in the sexual displays.<sup>18</sup> These earlier forms of porn highlighted the sense of shame surrounding the porn industry at the time.

Hugh Hefner chose an entirely different approach with his magazine. He intended to "imitate prestigious magazines such as *The Saturday Evening Post* and *The New Yorker*"<sup>19</sup> by utilizing high quality paper, advanced formatting and graphics, and publishing respected writers and photographers. One major change Hefner brought to porn was the introduction of the "girl next door." This All-American girl was the extreme opposite of the prostitutes who came before her as she typically "enjoyed long walks on the beach, playing the guitar, and sharing a candlelit bottle of wine with that special

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<sup>16</sup> Sarracino & Scott, *The Porning of America*, p. 11.

<sup>17</sup> Sarracino & Scott, *The Porning of America*, p. 12.

<sup>18</sup> Sarracino & Scott, *The Porning of America*, p. 12.

<sup>19</sup> Sarracino & Scott, *The Porning of America*, p. 12.

someone.”<sup>20</sup> Hefner hoped that this new kind of girl would be easy for his desired audience to relate to. He clearly understood that “the principal element in the mainstreaming of porn is that it enters the world that the readers/viewers themselves inhabit or would like to inhabit.”<sup>21</sup> As readers flipped through the glossy pages of *Playboy* they were transported to a young man’s paradise filled with pictures of beautiful girls mixed in with articles about stereo equipment, trendy apartments, and cars.

*Playboy* helped this newer, soft-core version of pornography detach itself from the negative associations of older porn. Unlike the sense of shame surrounding the older porn industry, *Playboy* focused on making its readers feel like the “affluent, smart, informed winners they aspired to be.”<sup>22</sup> Many other porn magazines got their start by trying to compete with *Playboy* by offering either slightly different versions of the same soft-core porn, or by focusing instead on more sexually explicit images. *Penthouse Magazine*, founded by Bob Guccione, is another example of soft-core porn, while Larry Flynt’s *Hustler Magazine* is known for being more explicit.

If *Playboy* helped to mainstream print pornography, then *Deep Throat* did the same for pornographic videos and movies. Prior to the release of *Deep Throat* in 1972, most porn videos were twenty minute long, 8 mm stag movies that focused on prostitutes.<sup>23</sup> With its run time of an hour and a half and its fully scripted plot with actual

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<sup>20</sup> Sarracino & Scott, *The Porning of America*, p. 12.

<sup>21</sup> Sarracino & Scott, *The Porning of America*, p. 12.

<sup>22</sup> Sarracino & Scott, *The Porning of America*, p. 13.

<sup>23</sup> Sarracino & Scott, *The Porning of America*, p. 13.

characters, *Deep Throat* completely abandoned the stag movie format. It was basically “a Hollywood movie, but with the added feature of plenty of graphic sex.”<sup>24</sup>

The movie was truly a milestone of American culture. Financially, the movie was a groundbreaking blockbuster that shot for about \$24 thousand and grossed approximately \$600 million worldwide.<sup>25</sup> Nothing like it had ever been seen in the porn industry. Many people attribute its acceptance, cultural assimilation, and overall success to the fact that it was viewed as a kind of porn comedy. The slapstick humor that can be seen throughout the film helped to give it a mass-market appeal, which in turn helped to normalize it.

The star of the film, Linda Lovelace, capitalized on the “girl next door” image created by Hefner a few decades earlier. Although she was a former prostitute who appeared in several 8 mm stag films, Lovelace was able to reinvent herself as an actress in *Deep Throat*. She even appeared in an extensive spread for *Playboy* following the film’s release and success.<sup>26</sup> Lovelace was able to become a “star” because she appeared in a type of movie that was considered legitimate because it played in actual theaters, featured actors, had a sound track, and rolled credits.<sup>27</sup>

The success of *Deep Throat* led it to be praised by many well-known celebrities. Top-tier celebrities including Frank Sinatra, Mike Nichols, and Sammy Davis Jr. raved about the film.<sup>28</sup> Obviously these celebrities were not embarrassed at all about having seen the film. Comics of the time, such as Johnny Carson and Bob Hope, even made

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<sup>24</sup> Sarracino & Scott, *The Porning of America*, p. 13.

<sup>25</sup> Sarracino & Scott, *The Porning of America*, p. 14.

<sup>26</sup> Sarracino & Scott, *The Porning of America*, p. 15.

<sup>27</sup> Sarracino & Scott, *The Porning of America*, p. 17.

<sup>28</sup> Sarracino & Scott, *The Porning of America*, p. 14.

jokes about the film, which was their way of praising it.<sup>29</sup> The public acceptance as well as the celebrity praise helped to legitimize *Deep Throat's* place in the world. It set a precedent for films to come, such as *Behind the Green Door*. Most importantly, it set the stage for the popularizing of porn films and the Internet porn phenomenon that can be seen in today's society.

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<sup>29</sup> Sarracino & Scott, *The Porning of America*, p. 17.

## Internet Pornography and the Development of Porn Sub-Genres

The various forms of pornographic media have all had their effect on porn production and distribution. However, it is an undeniable fact that nothing has had as large an impact on the porn industry as the Internet. “In 1991, the year the World Wide Web went online, there were fewer than ninety different adult magazines published in America.”<sup>30</sup> The Internet enabled “about nine hundred pornography sites” to spring up by 1997.<sup>31</sup> These numbers illustrate why during the 1990s “online pornography was recognized as the one successful form of online content production and distribution.”<sup>32</sup> It is easy to question whether or not the online market would exist in its current form if not for the initial success of porn. Certainly the Digital Revolution would have eventually occurred, but most likely in a different time frame.

Today the number of porn sites on the Internet is difficult to estimate, but “the filtering software CYBERSitter blocks 2.5 million adult Web sites.”<sup>33</sup> In fact, two of the “Rules of the Internet”<sup>34</sup> accurately illustrate the current plethora of porn found on the Web. Rule 34 states, “There is porn of it, no exceptions.”<sup>35</sup> Rule 35 serves to clarify rule 34 and says, “If no porn is found of it, it will be made.”<sup>36</sup> The sheer amount of porn available on the Internet allows for an enormous amount of diversity, which gives way to

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<sup>30</sup> Ogas, Ogi and Gaddam, Sai, *A Billion Wicked Thoughts: What the World’s Largest Experiment Reveals About Human Desire* (New York: Dutton, 2011), p. 8.

<sup>31</sup> Ogas and Gaddam, *A Billion Wicked Thoughts*, p. 8.

<sup>32</sup> Paasonen, Susanna, *Carnal Resonance: Affect and Online Pornography* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2011), p. 33.

<sup>33</sup> Ogas and Gaddam, *A Billion Wicked Thoughts*, p. 8.

<sup>34</sup> [http://rulesoftheinternet.com/index.php?title=Main\\_Page](http://rulesoftheinternet.com/index.php?title=Main_Page)

<sup>35</sup> [http://rulesoftheinternet.com/index.php?title=Main\\_Page](http://rulesoftheinternet.com/index.php?title=Main_Page)

<sup>36</sup> [http://rulesoftheinternet.com/index.php?title=Main\\_Page](http://rulesoftheinternet.com/index.php?title=Main_Page)



the “endless browsing and discovery” that has become a “key aspect of hunting for porn online.”<sup>37</sup>

An important distinction to consider when looking at porn on the Internet is that of “netporn” versus “porn found on the Net.” “Netporn refers to pornographic (material) specific to the Internet” while porn found on the Net refers “to the recycling of pornographic images and texts from print media, video and film, on the Internet.”<sup>38</sup> The latter got its start when popular magazine porn companies, for example *Playboy* and *Hustler*, branched out into Internet production and distribution in the late 1990s.<sup>39</sup> These popular magazine corporations clearly realized that there was money to be made on the Web and thus ventured into the online world hoping to get their share of Internet profits. However, magazine companies were met with competition from netporn as it began to demonstrate the “ways in which online technologies restructure the pornographic impossible in other media.”<sup>40</sup> Therefore, a hierarchy came into existence that places the novel and aesthetically challenging netporn above the commercial and dull porn on the Net.<sup>41</sup> Netporn serves to push the boundaries of pornographic imagery with the idea of profit in the background. On the other hand, porn on the Net solely exists to allow the print media, video, and film sectors of the porn industry to make a profit online.

The difference between megasites and independently run websites is also an important one to consider. While the megasites have “frequently updated content and

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<sup>37</sup> Ray, Audacia, *Naked on the Internet: Hookups, Downloads, and Cashing in on Internet Sexploitation* (Emeryville: Seal Press, 2007), p. 142.

<sup>38</sup> Paasonen, Susanna, “Epilogue: Porn Futures” in *Pornification: Sex and Sexuality in Media Culture*, ed. Paasonen, Susanna, Nikunen, Kaarina, and Saarenmaa, Laura (New York: Berg, 2007), p. 164.

<sup>39</sup> Paasonen, *Carnal Resonance*, p. 35.

<sup>40</sup> Paasonen, “Epilogue: Porn Futures,” p. 164.

<sup>41</sup> Paasonen, “Epilogue: Porn Futures,” p. 164.

many models,” they do not have the “authenticity that some porn consumers crave.”<sup>42</sup> Instead, this level of authenticity is found on independent websites that focus on developing the models’ personalities through detailed profiles, blogs, and message boards. Although these sites are a small part of the Internet porn marketplace, they are able to exist and be successful because “their consumers become loyal and rabid devotees.”<sup>43</sup> For many online porn consumers, independent sites have become “the answer to the problem of cookie-cutter porn”<sup>44</sup> that is often found on megasites that exist solely for the purpose of mass production and distribution. Since these megasites have such a large clientele, they do not need to worry about gaining or losing loyal customers. However, the “endlessly updated bounty”<sup>45</sup> found on megasites is enough to keep most viewers coming back for more.

Independently run sites have allowed for the development of what has become known as “alt porn.” According to Urban Dictionary, alternative pornography is defined as “a medium (mainly online but also occasionally in print) consisting of an alternative to mainstream pornography; websites that often offer communities where members can communicate with models, breaking down barriers and exploitation by featuring models who are real people.”<sup>46</sup> As this genre has grown, the term “subculture” has been increasingly used to describe alt porn models and their websites.<sup>47</sup> The main marker of

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<sup>42</sup> Ray, *Naked on the Internet*, p. 154.

<sup>43</sup> Ray, *Naked on the Internet*, p. 154.

<sup>44</sup> Ray, *Naked on the Internet*, p. 155.

<sup>45</sup> Ray, *Naked on the Internet*, p. 138.

<sup>46</sup> Ray, *Naked on the Internet*, p. 160.

<sup>47</sup> Ray, *Naked on the Internet*, p. 160.

this version of online pornography is the presence of body piercings and tattoos on the models.

Many alt porn websites have political rather than financial motives behind their existence. Producers of alt porn sites often come to the business from a nude modeling background. These former models turn their “passion into their business” as they become “more interested in culture and politics.”<sup>48</sup> Some alt porn website administrators use their sites to promote feminist ideals. For instance, the websites run by a person known as Furry Girl feature “mostly non- or semi-professionals lacking in silicone implants and other standard porn star enhancements.”<sup>49</sup> These models are “of a variety of shapes and sizes” and offer a stark contrast to the strictly height-weight proportionate models found on megasites.<sup>50</sup> By demonstrating diversity among their models, these independent alt porn sites strive to break down the standards of beauty imposed on women in American society and made visible in mainstream porn. In a sense the independent porn producers are using their websites as platforms that allow them to “question the forms and limits of porn as an industry.”<sup>51</sup>

The success of alt porn “has given subcultural products and tastes unprecedented visibility.”<sup>52</sup> Its popularity demonstrates that sexuality and desire extend “beyond preconceived identities, labels and categories.”<sup>53</sup> Increasingly porn sites have become specialized and cater to specific sexual preferences, fetishes, and niches.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ray, *Naked on the Internet*, p. 160.

<sup>49</sup> Paasonen, “Epilogue: Porn Futures,” p. 161.

<sup>50</sup> Ray, *Naked on the Internet*, p. 165.

<sup>51</sup> Paasonen, “Epilogue: Porn Futures,” p. 161.

<sup>52</sup> Paasonen, “Epilogue: Porn Futures,” p. 161.

<sup>53</sup> Paasonen, “Epilogue: Porn Futures,” p. 161.

<sup>54</sup> Paasonen, “Epilogue: Porn Futures,” p. 161.

Some of these fetishes have become popular over time, while others remain on the fringe and appeal to a small minority of online porn viewers. Transgender porn “is one example of a sub-genre shifting from the margins of porn towards the mainstream.”<sup>55</sup> Transgender porn used to be produced in South America and South East Asia and was consumed primarily by very specific niche audiences.<sup>56</sup> However, in the 2000s it became mainstream “to the degree of being a key category in the online video service of the largest Finnish adult portal.”<sup>57</sup> The current “degree of commodification”<sup>58</sup> of transgender porn suggests that it has stepped away from the alternative porn scene and into the spotlight of mainstream porn. Thus, mainstream porn slowly encompasses increasing numbers of porn sub-genres and transforms them in the process. The commercial success of alt porn is seen as “both a desired outcome and something that gets easily snubbed.”<sup>59</sup> Obviously the financial benefits of becoming commercially successful are alluring to the producers of alt porn. However, they do not want to risk being called a “sellout” by their fellow porn producers. Alt porn must straddle the fine line between being too visible and possibly losing the alt porn label and not having enough viewers to spread their political messages.

The Internet also allows porn consumers with marginalized and unpopular obsessions to create supportive communities for people with similar interests. One example of a sub-genre that lends itself to this type of community is menstruation porn.

“The vast majority of these websites do not focus on menstruation as a sexual interest

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<sup>55</sup> Paasonen, “Epilogue: Porn Futures,” p. 163.

<sup>56</sup> Paasonen, “Epilogue: Porn Futures,” p. 163.

<sup>57</sup> Paasonen, “Epilogue: Porn Futures,” p. 163.

<sup>58</sup> Paasonen, “Epilogue: Porn Futures,” p. 163.

<sup>59</sup> Ray, *Naked on the Internet*, p. 169.

or fetish, but rather are sites run by men that focus on the refuse of menstruation soiled underwear, dirty maxi pads, and tampons.”<sup>60</sup> These sites are met with a tremendous amount of disdain and struggle to survive as credit-card companies regard “menstruation and other forms of blood play as out of bounds, citing obscenity violations as well as safer sex concerns.”<sup>61</sup> As long as the porn industry and billing companies continue to view menstruation porn as obscene, it will remain a small sub-genre of alt porn. It is interesting to note that the negative attitude towards menstruation porn “underlines the ways that the adult industry is set up to fetishize but not appreciate the female body and what it is capable of.”<sup>62</sup> The women behind many of the popular menstruation porn sites such as Erotic Red try to emphasize the natural aspects of menstruation and highlight the fact that “having a period is part of women’s sexuality.”<sup>63</sup>

Though “an estimated one fourth of Western Internet users access online porn,”<sup>64</sup> most people are unlikely to mention their fondness for such activities when asked about their uses of the Internet.”<sup>65</sup> It is also difficult to typify online porn viewers as their interests are far from homogenous. Internet porn has transformed the experience of pornography into a private one with no need for social interaction. Whereas people used to be forced to interact with newsstand clerks when buying magazine porn or video storeowners when obtaining video porn, nowadays “anyone can view porn on a smart phone while riding the subway or sneaking off to the office bathroom.”<sup>66</sup> The Internet

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<sup>60</sup> Ray, *Naked on the Internet*, p. 156.

<sup>61</sup> Ray, *Naked on the Internet*, p. 156.

<sup>62</sup> Ray, *Naked on the Internet*, p. 156.

<sup>63</sup> Ray, *Naked on the Internet*, p. 157.

<sup>64</sup> Paasonen, *Carnal Resonance*, p. 2.

<sup>65</sup> Paasonen, *Carnal Resonance*, p. 32.

<sup>66</sup> Ogas and Gaddam, *A Billion Wicked Thoughts*, p. 8.

provides a cloak of anonymity that some people need to explore their marginalized desires. The one area of Internet porn in which social interaction still exists is on alt porn websites that offer chat rooms and means of exchange between performers and consumers.<sup>67</sup> In this way porn users are able to learn more about their favorite models' personalities as well as about the specific type of alt porn they are interested in. Although these chat rooms can be viewed as a means of communication, the exchange is tainted by the fact that the Internet allows people to represent themselves in an inauthentic way. Thus, the models may not actually be anything like the way they describes themselves to be because they are focused on selling an image rather than portraying their true selves.

The success of Internet porn is definitely connected to the fact that a plethora of free porn sites exist. This benefits porn consumers who do not wish to pay for their viewing, but it also makes porn difficult to avoid. Today's potential consumers "can sample the product before buying, or, as often seems to be the case, sample the product without buying at all."<sup>68</sup> The free and anonymous access to online pornography that exists in today's society makes it possible for almost anyone to obtain some sort of obscene material. This becomes a problem when young adolescents begin to view porn, either by stumbling upon it or seeking it out for themselves. The sheer variety of options available online leads many adolescents to become curious and question the information they find. Problems arise when they start looking to people in chat rooms as

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<sup>67</sup> Paasonen, "Epilogue: Porn Futures," p. 164.

<sup>68</sup> Ray, *Naked on the Internet*, p. 137.

resources<sup>69</sup> instead of directing their questions to people they know and trust. Also, seeking information in an anonymous way at such a young age sets the stage for the social isolation that accompanies the private viewing of erotic material.

The huge success of Internet porn not only benefits the producers and performers of porn, it also guarantees a profitable market for Internet service providers. Even if consumers of porn do not want to pay for subscription-only porn sites, they must pay for the access to the Internet. Viewers must have “the necessary hardware, software, and bandwidth and skill to use them.”<sup>70</sup> The technology needed to participate in the online world of pornography creates many opportunities for tech companies to take advantage of. With the overall success of Internet porn and the ever-increasing number of porn sites, the puppets in the Broadway musical *Avenue Q* were absolutely correct in singing, “The Internet is for porn.”<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Ray, *Naked on the Internet*, p. 138.

<sup>70</sup> Paasonen, *Carnal Resonance*, p. 1.

<sup>71</sup> Ogas and Gaddam, *A Billion Wicked Thoughts*, p. 8.

## Advertisements and Mainstream Media

The success of porn has led mainstream media to look to the porn industry for inspiration on how to use sexual imagery to sell products and increase ratings. Taking advantage of the idea that “sex sells,” many companies have started to push the boundaries of what is acceptable in mainstream media. The advertising industry especially has capitalized on the use of explicit imagery to expand their profit margins. Although the focus of most research tends to be on how advertisements and other forms of mainstream media affect the self-image of women and girls, it is also important to consider the consequences hyper-sexualization can have on men and boys.

Companies wishing to sell products in today’s markets rely heavily on the use of what has been termed “everyday porn,”<sup>72</sup> which refers to the commercial industry’s use of overtly sexual media content. It is easy to find cover teasers that “mention orgasm and sexual techniques”<sup>73</sup> on newsstands today. In addition, the magazines are filled with advertisements that offer a “consistent representation of women and human sexuality that is molded by the codes and conventions of pornography” that center around the “exploitation, objectification, and domination of women.”<sup>74</sup> Of course, since sexual imagery has become extremely prevalent in popular culture, “the readers and viewers of these ads don’t take them literally,” but they do take them in and

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<sup>72</sup> Boyle, Karen, “Introduction: Everyday Pornography,” in *Everyday Pornography*, ed. Boyle, Karen (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 1.

<sup>73</sup> Kinnick, Katherine N., “Pushing the Envelope: The Role of Mass Media in the Mainstreaming of Pornography,” in *Pop-Porn: Pornography in American Culture*, ed. Hall, Ann C. and Bishop, Mardia J. (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2007), p. 9.

<sup>74</sup> Kinnick, Katherine N., “Pushing the Envelope: The Role of Mass Media in the Mainstreaming of Pornography,” p. 9.



unconsciously add “another grain of sand in a slowly accumulating and vast sandpile”<sup>75</sup> of exposure to pornographic imagery.

Examples of the vocabulary and tools of the porn industry being used in mainstream advertising are varied and expansive. Therefore, focusing on one ad aimed at women and one meant for a male audience provides insight into the mainstreaming of pornographic imagery and its effects on both genders. In 2006 Clinique released an ad for moisturizer that featured a “close-up of a young woman’s face splashed with a milky substance extending from her lips, across her cheek, and over the lid of her eye.”<sup>76</sup> Only a decade earlier this image would have been incomprehensible to most female consumers unless they were already familiar with hard-core porn. The advertising executives that designed the campaign knew that their modern target audience of young women would read the “image as a playful take on the most common, obligatory sex finale, in hard-core porn, the cumshot of facial.”<sup>77</sup> The Clinique ad offers both a “visual pun (“facial”) and an allusive verbal joke (“dramatically different moisturizing lotion”) intended to appeal to a sexually sophisticated, hip female sense of humor.”<sup>78</sup> Though the ad is meant to be humorous, it objectifies women through its use of a mannequin-like female face that shows no emotion. It suggests that women should be emotionless sex objects that perform obligatory sex acts solely for the purpose of

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<sup>75</sup> Kilbourne, Jean, “The More You Subtract, The More You Add: Cutting Girls Down to Size” in *Deadly Persuasion: Why Women and Girls Must Fight the Addictive Power of Advertising* (New York: The Free Press), p. 151.

<sup>76</sup> Sarracino, Carmine and Scott, Kevin M., “The Porning of America: The Rise of Porn Culture, What It Means, and Where We Go from Here,” p. 117.

<sup>77</sup> Sarracino, Carmine and Scott, Kevin M., “The Porning of America: The Rise of Porn Culture, What It Means, and Where We Go from Here,” p. 117.

<sup>78</sup> Sarracino, Carmine and Scott, Kevin M., “The Porning of America: The Rise of Porn Culture, What It Means, and Where We Go from Here,” p. 117.

pleasing men. In relating to the modern casual sex culture, Clinique tries to sell its product by proposing that a specific moisturizer can help women navigate the world of the hookup. The underlying message is that having a perfect and emotionless exterior can help protect women against the “emotional vulnerability in these days of impersonal and highly porned ( cumshot ) sexuality.”<sup>79</sup>

Magazines like *Cosmopolitan* and *Seventeen* are full of advertisements just like the one described above. The ads tell women and girls what products to buy to achieve a specific desirable result. In this case the ultimate goal would be the attraction of men and boys. “Primarily girls are told by advertisers that what is most important about them is their perfume, their clothing, their bodies, their beauty.”<sup>80</sup> This makes women feel pressure to be emotionless sex objects for men. The process of dehumanization that is apparent in these ads makes it obvious that men do not want women for their personalities, but solely for their bodies. However, men do not want just any female body, they want one that meets society’s standards of beauty. Therefore, many women spend enormous amount of time, energy, and money trying to “achieve something that is not only trivial but also completely unattainable.”<sup>81</sup> Beauty companies make it seem like using their products can make anyone look like the models in their advertisements. In reality, the current standard of beauty is unachievable and also promotes unsafe health practices like eating disorders and unnecessary plastic surgery.

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<sup>79</sup> Sarracino, Carmine and Scott, Kevin M., “The Porning of America: The Rise of Porn Culture, What It Means, and Where We Go from Here,” p. 119.

<sup>80</sup> Kilbourne, Jean, “The More You Subtract, The More You Add: Cutting Girls Down to Size,” p. 132.

<sup>81</sup> Kilbourne, Jean, “The More You Subtract, The More You Add: Cutting Girls Down to Size,” p. 132.

The 2007 Red Zone by Old Spice campaign is an example of an ad aimed at men that utilizes pornographic imagery to sell a product. Unlike the more subtle Clinique ad, Old Spice is much more upfront about its use of sexual imagery to sell body wash. It features a blonde woman with her eyes closed seductively licking a vanilla ice cream cone. She is obviously intended to represent the “girl next door” popularized by porn. The picture only includes her face and neck and therefore the viewer’s eyes are drawn to her tongue, which strategically has “semen-like melted ice cream”<sup>82</sup> on it. One part of the text even highlights the use of a beautiful woman in the ad: “Sure, she’s attractive, sultry, even. But she is only eating it because it tastes good and it is hot where she happens to be.”<sup>83</sup> The male viewers of this ad are encouraged to “keep it clean” if they want an attractive woman to eat it, referring obviously to a man’s semen. The other part of the text makes the intended use of humor apparent: “This is simply a picture of a woman eating a vanilla ice cream cone.”<sup>84</sup> If the viewer was not questioning the content of the ad at first glance, they are straightforwardly told what it is all about. Clearly, Old Spice is trying to convince the viewer that using Red Zone body wash will help him get a beautiful and seductive woman to perform oral sex on him. Again casual sex is emphasized through the image as well as in the text.

Male-oriented magazines like *Men’s Health*, *Maxim*, and the even more obvious *Playboy* feature many ads like the one described above. Advertisements that feature

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<sup>82</sup> Sarracino, Carmine and Scott, Kevin M., “The Porning of America: The Rise of Porn Culture, What It Means, and Where We Go from Here,” p. 120.

<sup>83</sup> Sarracino, Carmine and Scott, Kevin M., “The Porning of America: The Rise of Porn Culture, What It Means, and Where We Go from Here,” p. 120.

<sup>84</sup> Sarracino, Carmine and Scott, Kevin M., “The Porning of America: The Rise of Porn Culture, What It Means, and Where We Go from Here,” p. 119.

unusually beautiful women make men unsatisfied with the real women in their lives. In fact, a study done on male college students showed that after they were shown centerfolds from *Playboy* and *Penthouse* they “were more likely to find their own girlfriends less sexually attractive.”<sup>85</sup> Obviously this creates problems for men because they fail to realize the fact that all magazine pictures are edited and thus come to expect their girlfriends to be unrealistically beautiful. Ads like the one for Old Spice also presume that all men are interested in participating in the casual sex culture. Hygiene products are sold on the assumption that men want to “keep their genitals clean and ready for a woman who might, at any time in the unpredictable world of the hookup, fellate him.”<sup>86</sup> Those men who choose not to actively play a part in the realm of casual sex are left feeling emasculated as well as isolated from their peers. These men may experience a lowered sense of self-worth similar to that felt by women when viewing ads geared towards them. However, for the majority of men, advertisements do little to their own self-image and instead alter their perceptions of the real women in their lives.

Another medium through which porn imagery has become mainstream is music videos. Nelly’s 2004 single “Tip Drill” offers a perfect example of a music video that uses explicit sexual imagery. The title of the video is “slang for sex with a woman who has a good body but an unattractive face.”<sup>87</sup> This illustrates the dehumanizing aspects of porn that focus strictly on a woman’s body and nothing else. The video makes this “commodification of women literal by depicting the rapper running a credit card through

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<sup>85</sup> Kilbourne, Jean, “The More You Subtract, The More You Add: Cutting Girls Down to Size,” p. 133.

<sup>86</sup> Sarracino, Carmine and Scott, Kevin M., “The Porning of America: The Rise of Porn Culture, What It Means, and Where We Go from Here,” p. 122.

<sup>87</sup> Kinnick, Katherine N., “Pushing the Envelope: The Role of Mass Media in the Mainstreaming of Pornography,” p. 9.

a woman's buttocks."<sup>88</sup> The woman in the video is treated as if she is an object Nelly can purchase simply by flashing his credit card. She does not seem opposed to this idea as she willingly bends over so that Nelly can swipe his card. The video is truly degrading and demonstrates the dim view that men have of women in many porn films. "That the line is blurring between music video and porn is evidenced by the fact that top-selling rappers have 'branched out' to hosting triple-X-rated videos."<sup>89</sup> Music videos continue to push the boundaries of what is acceptable because they cater to a younger, more liberal audience. The young male audience of rap videos grew up with pornographic images all around them and therefore do not react as negatively to them as older generations. When something shocking is released in the world of music videos it usually has a huge shock factor at first but then gradually dies down as the audience adjusts to the new standard. This process of shock and subsequent acceptance encourages rap artists to include more explicit sexual imagery in their videos. After all, even if they are chastised for their actions, bad press is still better than no press in the entertainment industry.

Although many different types of mainstream media are affected by porn culture, the two that stand out the most are movies and television. The average member of American society spends a fair amount of time at movie theatres or in front of their home television sets. Thus, production companies often attempt to use sexual material to improve their ratings and attract more viewers. The 1999 film *American Pie* is a

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<sup>88</sup> Kinnick, Katherine N., "Pushing the Envelope: The Role of Mass Media in the Mainstreaming of Pornography," p. 9.

<sup>89</sup> Kinnick, Katherine N., "Pushing the Envelope: The Role of Mass Media in the Mainstreaming of Pornography," p. 9.

classic example of a mainstream movie drawing on porn culture to achieve box office success. “As with most teen comedies, *American Pie*’s sexual content is widely referenced in its marketing,”<sup>90</sup> and is made apparent in the opening scene when the main character masturbates to a scrambled porn channel in his bedroom. The movie revolves around a group of male high school students and their quest for casual sex encounters. When their attempts at seducing female partners fail, the young men often turn to porn to relieve their sexual tension. “That said, the representation of the porn consumer” in the film “is not straightforwardly celebratory: porn consumption is a sign of male sexual immaturity.”<sup>91</sup> The movie assumes that its audience understands the pervasiveness of porn usage among American high school males and uses this assumption as the basis of much of its humor. “As porn consumption remains wedded to the construction of male sexuality”<sup>92</sup> it “is assumed to be an inherent part of teen life.”<sup>93</sup>

The popularity of *American Pie* demonstrates the normalization of pornography in today’s society. Although the film is about high school students, it is rated R and therefore intended for a more mature audience. Clearly the rating does not work as a deterrent for many under aged teens as they prefer “sexually-saturated”<sup>94</sup> films and statistics demonstrate that they watch “twice as many R-rated films than films of all

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<sup>90</sup> Boyle, Karen, “Porn consumers’ public faces: mainstream media, address and representation,” in *Everyday Pornography*, ed. Boyle, Karen (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 141-142.

<sup>91</sup> Boyle, Karen, “Porn consumers’ public faces: mainstream media, address and representation,” p. 143.

<sup>92</sup> Boyle, Karen, “Porn consumers’ public faces: mainstream media, address and representation,” p. 143.

<sup>93</sup> Boyle, Karen, “Porn consumers’ public faces: mainstream media, address and representation,” p. 142.

<sup>94</sup> Kinnick, Katherine N., “Pushing the Envelope: The Role of Mass Media in the Mainstreaming of Pornography,” p. 20.

other ratings.”<sup>95</sup> It is important to consider how this amount of exposure to porn culture through film affects the youth of today. First of all, it suggests to adolescent males that women are sexual objects. When the boys in the film are unable to get real girls to comply with their sexual requests, they turn to the objectified women in porn. In this way women are seen as objects that can be easily substituted for one another. “The naturalizing of porn use also means that the industrial character of pornography is largely invisible”<sup>96</sup> and adolescent boys come to see it as simply part of their sexuality rather than the commercially constructed product that it is. The fact that mainstream films like *American Pie* make fun of porn use demonstrates that today’s society is more than accepting of the consumption of porn by males, even if they are underage.

Television shows like *Sex and the City* also expose viewers to significant sexually explicit material. The show chronicles the sexual escapades of four female friends in New York City and relies heavily on the female empowering ideologies promoted by *Cosmopolitan* magazine. The characters in the show symbolize “a new feminism geared toward female sexual activity.”<sup>97</sup> Their sexual confidence and power is often directly related to their compliance with the type of consumerism seen in magazine advertisements. Therefore, the sexual independence of the four women is directly tied to the products they purchase in order to uphold society’s ideal of beauty. Fashion is a very important aspect of *Sex and the City* as all of the characters are incredibly well

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<sup>95</sup> Kinnick, Katherine N., “Pushing the Envelope: The Role of Mass Media in the Mainstreaming of Pornography,” p. 20.

<sup>96</sup> Boyle, Karen, “Porn consumers’ public faces: mainstream media, address and representation,” p. 143.

<sup>97</sup> Nikunen, Kaarina, “Cosmo Girls Talk: Blurring Boundaries of Porn and Sex,” in *Pornification: Sex and Sexuality in Media Culture* ed. Paasonen, Susanna, Nikunen, Kaarina, and Saarenmaa, Laura (New York: Berg, 2007), p. 74.

dressed. The women often wear revealing clothes that are meant to signify their sexual liberation. In reality, their choice of clothing often leads to objectification by men, which results in the casual sex encounters the characters constantly seek. Thus, the women do not realize that buying into consumerist ideologies indirectly pressures them to participate in porn culture.

*Sex and the City* conveys powerful messages to women on the importance of being active players in a casual sex world. In fact, research found that “attitudes towards casual sex became more permissive after viewing shows that portrayed casual sex as routine or desirable.”<sup>98</sup> Once viewers have welcomed the idea of casual sex, the show provides guidelines for how to behave in sexual situations. Alternatively, there is a lot of focus within the show on “how to get and keep a man.”<sup>99</sup> This teaches women viewers that they have to change certain aspects of themselves if they wish to have long-term relationships with men. Obviously, given the explicit nature of the show, the ability to keep a man is “based on sexual expertise.”<sup>100</sup> The four characters often talk about their sexual encounters and give each other advice on how to please their men. In a way this mirrors the focus on male pleasure found in the porn industry. Even though the show is about women, there is definitely an emphasis on the importance of male satisfaction in sexual interactions.

The influence of porn culture can be seen throughout the various forms of mainstream media. In today’s society the use of sexual material goes hand-in-hand with

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<sup>98</sup> Kinnick, Katherine N., “Pushing the Envelope: The Role of Mass Media in the Mainstreaming of Pornography,” p. 21.

<sup>99</sup> Nikunen, Kaarina, “Cosmo Girls Talk: Blurring Boundaries of Porn and Sex,” p. 74.

<sup>100</sup> Nikunen, Kaarina, “Cosmo Girls Talk: Blurring Boundaries of Porn and Sex,” p. 74.



commercial success. Often when boundaries are pushed there is only a short period of shock before society's standards shift to allow for the acceptance of the appalling material. This habituation effect demonstrates the fact that there is truly no "limit to what mainstream media will show us, or what Americans will tolerate."<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Kinnick, Katherine N., "Pushing the Envelope: The Role of Mass Media in the Mainstreaming of Pornography," p. 22.

## Effects on Male Sexuality

Pornography has a profound impact on male sexuality. One survey study by David Loftus found that “the average age for exposure to erotic material of any sort... was less than 11½.”<sup>102</sup> This finding was consistent with the 1969 U.S. Commission of Obscenity and Pornography’s study of first exposure that surveyed a group of “college students who reported 71 percent had seen pornography by the age of 12.”<sup>103</sup> Although most men can recall the age at which they first viewed pornographic material, “very few men can recall the exact content of their first pornography.”<sup>104</sup> The sources of first exposure are varied and can include anything from ordinary sex-education books to the explicit *Penthouse* magazine.<sup>105</sup> Regardless of where the sexual images came from, a majority of men report “the first pornography they had seen showed only women.”<sup>106</sup> The problem with viewing porn at such an early age is that it has the potential to set the stage for a tainted view of women, addiction, and unrealistic sexual expectations. Because an eleven-year-old boy has no images of sex for comparison, he believes what he sees to be entirely normal images of human sexuality.<sup>107</sup> He does not see the intimacy involved in sex and instead begins to view it as an act meant strictly for the fulfillment of sexual urges.

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<sup>102</sup> Loftus, David, *Watching Sex: How Men Really Respond to Pornography* (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 2002), p. 2.

<sup>103</sup> Loftus, David, *Watching Sex: How Men Really Respond to Pornography*, p. 3.

<sup>104</sup> Loftus, David, *Watching Sex: How Men Really Respond to Pornography*, p. 3.

<sup>105</sup> Loftus, David, *Watching Sex: How Men Really Respond to Pornography*, p. 3.

<sup>106</sup> Loftus, David, *Watching Sex: How Men Really Respond to Pornography*, p. 3.

<sup>107</sup> Balan, Matthew, “CNN Highlights Pornography’s Destructive Effects on Society,”

<http://newsbusters.org/blogs/matthew-balan/2010/07/28/cnn-highlights-pornographys-destructive-effects-society>.

As boys mature into adolescence they often start watching porn in conjunction with masturbation. As the sexual curiosity of these boys continues to grow, many of them seek out different types of porn. Many teens begin to watch fetish porn as well as BDSM (bondage, discipline, sadism, and masochism) porn. These types of porn include many violent images of women being treated as sex objects rather than real people. Porn publicizes the idea that women are always ready for sex and ready to do whatever men want regardless of the physical and psychological consequences they may face.<sup>108</sup> When teenaged boys start having their first real-world sexual experiences, they are shocked to find that sex in real-life is nothing like how it is presented in pornographic images and videos. Many feel extremely let down by their own experiences and continue to rely on the generic porn sexuality they have grown used to.

It is interesting to note that if everything men “disliked in pornography could be summed up in a word, it would be ‘unreality.’”<sup>109</sup> Basically, porn is most effective for men when they believe the sexual situation could actually happen to them. This illustrates the skewed perceptions men have about sex because they imagine highly scripted and edited sexual encounters to be reality. Although men say their ideal porn is realistic in nature, they still expect to see “attractive or beautiful women.”<sup>110</sup> Therefore, they only want porn to be realistic in certain aspects because men still want to feel like they are living out their sexual fantasies through porn usage. To take the fantasy one step further, many men have a specific physical type they look for when viewing porn. For

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<sup>108</sup> Dines, Gail, *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010), p. xxiii.

<sup>109</sup> Loftus, David, *Watching Sex: How Men Really Respond to Pornography*, p. 30.

<sup>110</sup> Loftus, David, *Watching Sex: How Men Really Respond to Pornography*, p. 36.

example, Loftus' study mentioned "a sizeable minority liked Asian women,"<sup>111</sup> which is a relatively broad and non-specific demographic. However, other men had very specific types in mind. One man said he looked for "a petite, athletic redhead with freckles and small breasts who is intelligent and sexually adventurous."<sup>112</sup> A description as precise as this is almost impossible for any real woman to live up to. Thus, this man is setting himself up for sexual disappointment in the real world through his usage of porn that features such a specific type of woman. He is likely to feel dissatisfied by any woman who does not fit the criteria he has come to rely on for visual stimulation.

Further problems arise when porn-watching men enter into serious relationships with women. Most girlfriends become very angry and confused when they hear about their boyfriends' porn-watching past. In fact, some girlfriends attempt to demand that their boyfriends stop watching porn all together. However, this usually only makes the men more likely to want to watch porn. Those men who do choose to give up porn for their girlfriends and even go so far as to dispose of all their videos and cancel their memberships to porn websites still find themselves frequently thinking about porn.<sup>113</sup> It is obviously extremely difficult to reverse the effects of porn on male thoughts. Once the images have been recorded in their minds, it can be almost impossible to get rid of them. This is especially true when men try not to think about porn; as everyone knows it is impossible to keep your mind from drifting towards something you are not supposed to be thinking about.

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<sup>111</sup> Loftus, David, *Watching Sex: How Men Really Respond to Pornography*, p. 37.

<sup>112</sup> Loftus, David, *Watching Sex: How Men Really Respond to Pornography*, p. 37.

<sup>113</sup> Dines, Gail, *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality*, p. 92.

Some men who are unable to cease their porn usage when they find themselves in stable relationships try to incorporate their porn-related fantasies into their sex lives. Because some men become so accustomed to the pornographic images they have basically grown up watching, they want to “play out porn in the real world” with their girlfriends.<sup>114</sup> Most women react by asking their boyfriends why sex with them is not good enough.<sup>115</sup> To this most men will simply reply that they want to experiment and liven up their sex lives. However, the truth is that they are unable to be sexually satisfied without some porn-like aspect to their sexual activities. There are also times when women agree to incorporate porn into their relationships. At first these women tend to see it as a way to form a more intimate bond with their partner, but often they end up feeling cheap and betrayed.<sup>116</sup> When women see their partner’s response to pornographic images, they start to feel like he is having a sort of affair with the women in porn. This feeling of being cheated on can be intensified if women see the same response when they are engaged in sexual activities with their partners. In this way, porn interferes with the sexual activities of men in relationships in a cyclical way. They start off viewing porn when they are single and begin a sort of addiction to it. Then when they are in a relationship they are unable to stop their porn usage because they have come to rely on it. Ultimately this can lead to their partner leaving them out of frustration, which places the men back where they started.

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<sup>114</sup> Dines, Gail, *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality*, p. 67.

<sup>115</sup> Balan, Matthew, “CNN Highlights Pornography’s Destructive Effects on Society,” <<http://newsbusters.org/blogs/matthew-balan/2010/07/28/cnn-highlights-pornographys-destructive-effects-society>>.

<sup>116</sup> Dines, Gail, *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality*, p. 92.

Issues related to porn lead many couples to end their relationships. In fact, the Matrimonial Lawyers Association has found that approximately 56% of divorce cases involve one person in the marriage who has an obsession with pornographic websites.<sup>117</sup> This huge number undoubtedly includes some female porn users; however, it can be assumed that the large majority is male. Many women feel that they have done something wrong that has caused their partners to turn to pornography for sexual satisfaction. What these women fail to realize is that it really has nothing to do with them. The “industrial-strength sex” that is available through porn simply makes real-world sexual activities seem bland and unexciting.<sup>118</sup>

Watching porn can also cause men to focus in on their bodily shortcomings as well as their sexual performance flaws. Many of the male actors seen in pornography have “a body ideal painstakingly cultivated by young men all over America, referred to as buff or ‘cut.’”<sup>119</sup> This look is not connected with athletics or body-building, but rather “is one we recognize from porn: the stud.”<sup>120</sup> Despite every effort to achieve this ideal, men constantly fall short and as a result view their bodies as imperfect in comparison to the stud gods of porn. In terms of sexual performance, “pornography... shows men what it means to be a real man having real sex.”<sup>121</sup> Therefore, many men find themselves

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<sup>117</sup> Balan, Matthew, “CNN Highlights Pornography’s Destructive Effects on Society,” <http://newsbusters.org/blogs/matthew-balan/2010/07/28/cnn-highlights-pornographys-destructive-effects-society>.

<sup>118</sup> Balan, Matthew, “CNN Highlights Pornography’s Destructive Effects on Society,” <http://newsbusters.org/blogs/matthew-balan/2010/07/28/cnn-highlights-pornographys-destructive-effects-society>.

<sup>119</sup> Sarracino, Carmine and Scott, Kevin M., *The Porning of America: The Rise of Porn Culture, What It Means, and Where We Go from Here*, p. 45.

<sup>120</sup> Sarracino, Carmine and Scott, Kevin M., *The Porning of America: The Rise of Porn Culture, What It Means, and Where We Go from Here*, p. 45.

<sup>121</sup> Loftus, David, *Watching Sex: How Men Really Respond to Pornography*, p. 61.

making comparisons between their own sexual encounters and the ones they see in porn. After watching porn, many men “are disappointed with what they see as their too-quick ejaculations, their inability to perform over and over again, and their unsophisticated techniques.”<sup>122</sup> These feelings of inadequacy often lead to anger towards their sexual partners and an overall feeling of defeat. This may in turn lead men back to pornography because they feel frustrated with women and unable to perform in real-world sexual experiences. Thus, men who frequently view pornography sometimes find it difficult to have sex with an actual human being.<sup>123</sup> Sadly, intimacy has the potential to become a real problem for these men. Another aspect of porn that hurts the self-esteem of men is the focus on penis size. Men who watch pornographic films report comparing themselves “unfavorably with the guys in the movies.”<sup>124</sup> Although most men manage to “belittle or outgrow their own negative feelings”<sup>125</sup> about their sexual organs, the act of initial comparison undoubtedly has lasting effects on their self-confidence. If men are left to feel like they do not measure up to their porn star counterparts, then they may not feel entirely comfortable during their own sexual encounters. This could directly affect their partners and subsequently both their sexual and emotional relationship.

Thus far the focus has been on the negative effects pornography usage can have on male sexuality. It is important to note, however, that porn also benefits men in its own way when used appropriately and in moderation. First of all, porn provides

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<sup>122</sup> Dines, Gail, *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality*, p. 90.

<sup>123</sup> Balan, Matthew, “CNN Highlights Pornography’s Destructive Effects on Society,” <<http://newsbusters.org/blogs/matthew-balan/2010/07/28/cnn-highlights-pornographys-destructive-effects-society>>.

<sup>124</sup> Loftus, David, *Watching Sex: How Men Really Respond to Pornography*, p. 68.

<sup>125</sup> Loftus, David, *Watching Sex: How Men Really Respond to Pornography*, p. 72.

“masturbation material”<sup>126</sup> for men regardless of their relationship status. Reports from men “affirmed that they used pornography more often when they were not in a relationship.”<sup>127</sup> Obviously single men do not have the same access to sex as their committed counterparts and therefore some rely more heavily on porn to relieve their sexual tension. Those in relationships who are able to successfully incorporate porn into their life usually do so in one of two ways. Either they only use porn when they are “temporarily apart from their partners,”<sup>128</sup> or they find a way to model their porn fantasies without insulting their partners. The second way may involve using porn to demonstrate poses or the use of toys in a way that does not make the partner feel inadequate. Also, not all men view porn with the sole intent of arousing themselves to orgasm. In fact, some men use porn simply as a turn-on and nothing else, while others report developing “an intellectual interest in the subject.”<sup>129</sup> Pornography usage by men should not be viewed in a strictly negative light. Although it has dire consequences for those who seem to develop a sort of addiction to it and are unable to experience sexual desire and pleasure without it, there are many instances of men who are able to incorporate its usage into a healthy relationship. The important thing to realize is that like most things, porn usage can be beneficial when used responsibly and in moderation. Only when porn becomes used to the extent that it disturbs normal sexual behavior does it become an issue that needs to be addressed. Porn itself is not threatening male sexuality.

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<sup>126</sup> Loftus, David, *Watching Sex: How Men Really Respond to Pornography*, p. 73.

<sup>127</sup> Loftus, David, *Watching Sex: How Men Really Respond to Pornography*, p. 76.

<sup>128</sup> Loftus, David, *Watching Sex: How Men Really Respond to Pornography*, p. 76.

<sup>129</sup> Loftus, David, *Watching Sex: How Men Really Respond to Pornography*, p. 74.



Rather, it is the expectations men have that develop from porn usage that lead to a decrease in sexual satisfaction.

## Effects on Female Sexuality

While women do not consume porn at the same rate as men, they are still affected by today's porn-watching society. Many female problems with porn stem from and intensify already existing issues related to body image. Women feel like they are constantly being compared to the super thin, silicone-enhanced women featured in pornographic material. And in all reality, they are being compared to these women in the minds of their male partners. "Pornography connects good sex exclusively with the Barbie-like bodies of porn-stars,"<sup>130</sup> which leads to many problems that are related to self-esteem in women.

One issue that is often "overlooked is how the emergence of stereotypical pornographic clothing as fashionable or socially acceptable dress affects girls."<sup>131</sup> Although most studies focus on how porn-inspired clothing has affected teenagers, it is obvious in today's society that teenage styles have made their way into the children's department. In fact, "the majority of clothes on retailers' racks for girls aged 5-11 are styles that stem from the porn industry."<sup>132</sup> Some examples of styles that illustrate the influence of pornography are: spaghetti-strap tank tops, corset-inspired tops, low-cut jeans, tiered skirts, halter dresses, "baby doll" dresses, tight mini-dresses, high-heeled boots, and platform shoes.<sup>133</sup> However, the most shocking example is the selling of

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<sup>130</sup> Sarracino, Carmine and Scott, Kevin M., *The Porning of America: The Rise of Porn Culture, What it Means, and Where We Go from Here*, p. 182.

<sup>131</sup> Bishop, Mardia J., "The Making of a Pre-Pubescent Porn Star: Contemporary Fashion for Elementary School Girls," in *Pop-Porn: Pornography in American Culture* ed. Hall, Ann C. and Bishop, Mardia J. (Praeger Publishers: Westport, 2007), p. 45.

<sup>132</sup> Bishop, Mardia J., "The Making of a Pre-Pubescent Porn Star: Contemporary Fashion for Elementary School Girls," p. 46.

<sup>133</sup> Bishop, Mardia J., "The Making of a Pre-Pubescent Porn Star: Contemporary Fashion for Elementary School Girls," p. 46-47.

thong underwear to pre-pubescent girls with phrases such as “Feeling Lucky” and “Eye Candy” by Abercrombie & Fitch.<sup>134</sup> The fact that thong underwear exists for young girls who have no reason to be wearing it illustrates the popularity of porn fashion and also the process by which it is passed down. “Porn fashion is designed for junior sizes and then adapted for the younger... sizes.”<sup>135</sup> In some instances this “trickle-down effect is seen all the way down to baby sizes”<sup>136</sup> with lace camisoles and tiered skirts designed for two-year-olds.

A survey of K-5<sup>th</sup> grade teachers was conducted to understand why young girls dress in porn fashion. The teachers agreed that girls wear porn fashion because “the girls thought it made them look older.”<sup>137</sup> Young girls clearly want to imitate the teenaged stars that are heavily represented in mainstream media and who tend to dress in provocative ways. This early sexualization of young girls through the clothing they wear is dangerous to their sexuality. They are “forced into looking and acting like an older person when they aren’t at a developmental stage to understand boundaries,”<sup>138</sup> which puts them at risk both psychologically and physically. The focus on clothes and appearance sets girls up for reduced self-esteem and acceptance of society’s view of the female body.

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<sup>134</sup> Bishop, Mardia J., “The Making of a Pre-Pubescent Porn Star: Contemporary Fashion for Elementary School Girls,” p. 48.

<sup>135</sup> Bishop, Mardia J., “The Making of a Pre-Pubescent Porn Star: Contemporary Fashion for Elementary School Girls,” p. 48.

<sup>136</sup> Bishop, Mardia J., “The Making of a Pre-Pubescent Porn Star: Contemporary Fashion for Elementary School Girls,” p. 48-49.

<sup>137</sup> Bishop, Mardia J., “The Making of a Pre-Pubescent Porn Star: Contemporary Fashion for Elementary School Girls,” p. 49.

<sup>138</sup> Bishop, Mardia J., “The Making of a Pre-Pubescent Porn Star: Contemporary Fashion for Elementary School Girls,” p. 50.

As girls grow up in a “pornified’ culture in which aspects of pornography have infiltrated contemporary pop culture from fashion and toys to television and music,”<sup>139</sup> they are taught to accept the sexual objectification of women. “Pornography positions females as objects that are there to sexually please males”<sup>140</sup> and requires them to be physically attractive. As women internalize society’s standards of beauty their sense of self-worth fluctuates according to how successful they are at achieving the current beauty ideal.<sup>141</sup> Based on what can be seen in the media today, the current standard of beauty involves being incredibly thin. There is a simultaneous focus on “blond hair, large breasts, full lips, and sculpted cheekbones.”<sup>142</sup>

The pursuit of the ideal thin body can lead to harmful and sometimes fatal eating disorders. With porn use, men have come to expect their female sexual partners to be thin and shaped like the women seen in porn. Because many porn actresses are chosen specifically for their appearance, they create a female stereotype that is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for the average woman to achieve. As a result, many women develop eating disorders in their quest to become the thin, perfect women their sexual partners expect them to be. Many women believe that men will not find them sexually desirable if they do not meet society’s specifications of the perfect woman. Conforming to this image is extremely seductive for women because it not only

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<sup>139</sup> Bishop, Mardia J., “The Making of a Pre-Pubescent Porn Star: Contemporary Fashion for Elementary School Girls,” p. 51.

<sup>140</sup> Bishop, Mardia J., “The Making of a Pre-Pubescent Porn Star: Contemporary Fashion for Elementary School Girls,” p. 51.

<sup>141</sup> Bishop, Mardia J., “The Making of a Pre-Pubescent Porn Star: Contemporary Fashion for Elementary School Girls,” p. 52.

<sup>142</sup> Bishop, Mardia J., “The Making of a Pre-Pubescent Porn Star: Contemporary Fashion for Elementary School Girls,” p. 52.

offers them an identity that complies with the rules of society, but it also leads to increased attention from men.<sup>143</sup> Both of these benefits make the women feel empowered and desired, and therefore help to perpetuate their eating disorder. Once they are caught in this vicious cycle, it can be extremely difficult for women to get their eating disorders under control primarily because they do not want to lose the sense of control they have become dependent on. Hence, eating disorders are an example of a psychological issue that has physically harmful ramifications.

One circumstance that very few men think about when watching porn is the fact that there is always the possibility of the physical consequence of women becoming pregnant. “In the porn world women are never concerned about pregnancy (or) STDs.”<sup>144</sup> However, in the real-world pregnancy and STDs are two things that every woman worries about every time she engages in sexual activities. Some men who watch porn do not seem to consider or understand this worry and sometimes trivialize the importance of contraceptives or safe-sex practices that are meant to decrease the likelihood of contracting an STD. In an attempt to act out the sexual stories they have seen in pornographic videos, many men will refuse to wear a condom because the men in porn never have to do so. This causes many problems for women who might be uncomfortable demanding their partner to wear a condom. The spread of STDs is rampant in our society, and it is possible that pornographic influences may contribute significantly to this problem. In fact, the Los Angeles City Council recently approved an

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<sup>143</sup> Dines, Gail, *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality*, p. 112.

<sup>144</sup> Dines, Gail, *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality*, p. xxii-xxiv.

ordinance requiring porn actors to wear condoms in an attempt to combat this issue.<sup>145</sup>

Unwanted pregnancies are also a problem, especially with the current debate on abortion. Therefore, imposing this type of regulation on the adult film industry could likely decrease the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, while simultaneously reducing the number of unwanted pregnancies.

The expectation of certain grooming patterns is another problem that has developed in conjunction with the porn phenomenon. Men have come to expect particular grooming patterns from their sexual partners that directly reflect what they see in porn. Instead of grooming their pubic area in the way they feel most comfortable, many women conform to the wishes of their partners and opt for Brazilian waxes or shaving.<sup>146</sup> In order to rationalize this decision and make it seem like their own, women claim that this type of grooming makes them feel “clean, hot, and well-groomed.”<sup>147</sup> When women choose not to meet the expectations of their partners, many men will simply find other women who do groom themselves in a manner they find sexually arousing. Many men believe that it is the responsibility of women to look good for their partners and think that pubic area grooming is just another part of taking care of your body. Some women choose to use this grooming to their advantage and will purposely refrain from shaving or waxing before going out at night in order to prevent themselves from engaging in sexual activities with random men.<sup>148</sup> The fact that women are

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<sup>145</sup> Watson, Bruce, “New Safe-Sex Porn Law Could Cost Los Angeles Billions,” DailyFinance. 12 May 2012. <<http://www.dailyfinance.com/2012/01/18/new-safe-sex-porn-law-could-cost-los-angeles-billions/>>.

<sup>146</sup> Dines, Gail, *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality*, p. 99.

<sup>147</sup> Dines, Gail, *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality*, p. 99.

<sup>148</sup> Dines, Gail, *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality*, p. 100.

expected to groom themselves in a specific way in order to sexually arouse their partners illustrates the impact porn has on female bodies.

Porn also influences the language that is used to describe females in everyday life. Many pornographic videos include some sort of derogatory name calling of women. For instance, women in porn seem to be incredibly immune to being called sluts, “a term that is used to control and stigmatize female sexual desire and behavior.”<sup>149</sup> Even with the modern female desire for sexual empowerment, being called a slut is still psychologically devastating. Because men see other men calling women sluts in porn movies, they think that it is acceptable to label real women in the same way. This has led to not only a widespread use of the term among men, but also among women. It is not entirely uncommon to hear female friends call each other sluts. In this sense, it is meant as a sort of compliment in regards to their physical appearance. However, just hearing the term, whether from your friend or your sexual partner, can be unconsciously degrading. It is interesting to note that no male equivalent exists for the word slut. Men who are thought to be highly promiscuous are thought of positively by their peers and are referred to as stags or studs, titles most men would gladly accept.<sup>150</sup> However, many women who have been publicly labeled as sluts will resort to all kinds of self-destructive behaviors such as alcohol abuse, eating disorders, and risky sexual conduct.<sup>151</sup>

Despite the negative effects of pornography on women’s self-esteem, they have sought to find their own place in the porn industry through what has become known as

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<sup>149</sup> Dines, Gail, *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality*, p. 115.

<sup>150</sup> Dines, Gail, *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality*, p. 115.

<sup>151</sup> Dines, Gail, *Pornland: How Porn Has Hijacked Our Sexuality*, p. 115.

women's porn. This type of porn tends to focus on "sexual mutuality and the exploration of women's fantasies."<sup>152</sup> Some typical characteristics of women's porn are: aesthetically pleasing surroundings, focus on seduction and chemistry between partners, presence of a storyline, real orgasms, and more realistic body types.<sup>153</sup> Although these features are often seen in women's porn, it is important to note that "a good bit of variety does exist."<sup>154</sup> For many women, the advent of the Internet created a safe place for them to "explore and experience porn without having to face a store clerk."<sup>155</sup> Like their male counterparts, women spend time browsing porn websites "sometimes with intent to masturbate, sometimes for curiosity's sake."<sup>156</sup>

Unlike men, women tend to have a lot of interest in written erotica. Thus, it is "often perceived as the domain of women."<sup>157</sup> "Most collections of erotica are, indeed, aimed at a female audience, and the websites whose content is focused on erotic writing often promote a female perspective."<sup>158</sup> The popularly held theory about why consumption of written erotica is high in women and low in men centers around the "assumption that men are more visually oriented than women."<sup>159</sup> However, it is much more likely that the difference is due to the lack of appealing visual material that women desire. Since visual porn tends to be a male domain, a significant quantity of women's

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<sup>152</sup> Sarracino, Carmine and Scott, Kevin M., *The Porning of America: The Rise of Porn Culture, What it Means, and Where We Go from Here*, p. 188.

<sup>153</sup> Sarracino, Carmine and Scott, Kevin M., *The Porning of America: The Rise of Porn Culture, What it Means, and Where We Go from Here*, p. 189.

<sup>154</sup> Sarracino, Carmine and Scott, Kevin M., *The Porning of America: The Rise of Porn Culture, What it Means, and Where We Go from Here*, p. 188.

<sup>155</sup> Ray, *Naked on the Internet*, p. 136-137.

<sup>156</sup> Ray, *Naked on the Internet*, p. 137.

<sup>157</sup> Ray, *Naked on the Internet*, p. 139.

<sup>158</sup> Ray, *Naked on the Internet*, p. 140.

<sup>159</sup> Ray, *Naked on the Internet*, p. 140.



porn simply does not exist. Because written erotica does not involve the use of real bodies, it “can break free from many of the constraints”<sup>160</sup> of video pornography. Women readers are able to cast their own scenes instead of being “force-fed the sex industry’s ideal”<sup>161</sup> bodies and sex acts. Therefore, written erotica is another medium through which women are able to gain sexual independence and explore their own desires.

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<sup>160</sup> Ray, *Naked on the Internet*, p. 141.

<sup>161</sup> Ray, *Naked on the Internet*, p. 141.

## College Hookup Culture

The term “hookup culture” has become inseparable from college life in America today. Many aspects of this culture stem from porn and the hyper-sexualization of society in general. When men and women arrive on a college campus, they are often forced into a lifestyle that promotes casual sex and downplays the importance of meaningful relationships. The experience of the hookup culture is different for male and female students, and many of the differences relate directly to those seen in the porn industry. The consequences of this way of life have been passionately debated in recent years with some arguing for a solution and others claiming that there is nothing to be fixed.

If the fashion of elementary school girls has been affected by the porn industry, then college fashion has taken it to the extreme. On most college campuses female students can be seen wearing an assortment of clothing and accessories that come directly from porn fashion. “Low-cut tops, low rider ‘skinny’ jeans, thongs, piercings, and tattoos”<sup>162</sup> have all become staples in the wardrobes of collegiate women. It is important to note that the purpose of these items is to blatantly parade and frame the three most important body parts in “both soft pornography and contemporary fashion: breasts, booties, and bellies.”<sup>163</sup> Using the example of low-rider jeans, it is easy to see how they are designed to draw attention to certain parts of the female body. In front, they “direct the eye straight towards the waist and belly” and offer “an implied line leading straight to

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<sup>162</sup> Harvey, Hannah B. and Robinson, Karen, “Hot Bodies on Campus: The Performance of Porn Chic,” in *Pop-Porn: Pornography in American Culture* ed. Hall, Ann C. and Bishop, Mardia J. (Praeger Publishers: Westport, 2007), p. 64.

<sup>163</sup> Harvey, Hannah B. and Robinson, Karen, “Hot Bodies on Campus: The Performance of Porn Chic,” p. 64.

the crotch.”<sup>164</sup> Meanwhile in the back “these jeans play peek-a-boo with a woman’s posterior, falling down and showing the ‘whale tale’ of a thong and/or her ‘crack’ as she moves through her daily routines.”<sup>165</sup> Many colloquial terms heard on college campuses sexually objectify women based on the way they look in their low-rider jeans. “The pooch of lower torso flesh excessively poofing out of low-rise jeans”<sup>166</sup> has come to be known as a “muffin top.” This name basically describes “this part of a woman’s body as edible, consumable, and like a purchasable treat in a store.”<sup>167</sup> Two other names for this part of the body, hip tits and love handles, also treat the female body as a sexual object. A plethora of terms like these exist to describe different parts of the female figure, and it is not uncommon to hear women use these expressions when talking about their peers. This degrading manner of speaking has become so engrained in college culture that women no longer think twice about the foundation of commodification it was built upon.

When college women “go out,” often on weekend nights, the clothes they choose are usually even more provocative than the clothing they wear on campus during the week. They embrace the “porn chic” ideal in an upfront manner as they dress with the purpose of attracting men to hook up with. Women put a lot of effort into shaping “their bodies to resemble an unattainable fantasy ideal”<sup>168</sup> in order to look desirable in porn

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<sup>164</sup> Harvey, Hannah B. and Robinson, Karen, “Hot Bodies on Campus: The Performance of Porn Chic,” p. 65.

<sup>165</sup> Harvey, Hannah B. and Robinson, Karen, “Hot Bodies on Campus: The Performance of Porn Chic,” p. 65.

<sup>166</sup> Harvey, Hannah B. and Robinson, Karen, “Hot Bodies on Campus: The Performance of Porn Chic,” p. 65.

<sup>167</sup> Harvey, Hannah B. and Robinson, Karen, “Hot Bodies on Campus: The Performance of Porn Chic,” p. 65.

<sup>168</sup> Harvey, Hannah B. and Robinson, Karen, “Hot Bodies on Campus: The Performance of Porn Chic,” p. 69.

chic fashion styles. Because “porn chic assumes one size... for all bodies,”<sup>169</sup> it “literally forces women into certain body shapes.”<sup>170</sup> As female students struggle to squeeze into tiny skirts that accentuate their posteriors and drape themselves in cleavage-revealing tops, they actively take part in the commodification of their body parts. However, it is almost impossible for a woman to buy new clothing that does not draw attention to her sexualized body parts. In this way, the effect of the porn industry on current college fashion is obvious. “The fashion machine that now popularly rides the line between fashion/porn purposely sets women up to have their clothing choices – and women themselves – appraised as ‘hot’ or ‘trash.’”<sup>171</sup> The opinions of their male peers become an important determinant in the way that college women dress in order to assure their place in the hookup culture.

The hookup culture also perpetuates the sexual double standard that is obvious in the consumption of pornography. In today’s society it is acceptable for men to view pornography, but women who do the same are seen as lewd. The labels used to describe sexually promiscuous college men and women further illustrate the differences in expectations between the two genders. A man who is very active in the hookup culture is known as a “player” and is generally respected by his male peers. “For men, there is no stigma for engaging in ‘heavy’ sexual activity.”<sup>172</sup> In fact, the men who face the most negative consequences are those “who cannot ‘get any’ (i.e., they are virgins

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<sup>169</sup> Harvey, Hannah B. and Robinson, Karen, “Hot Bodies on Campus: The Performance of Porn Chic,” p. 70.

<sup>170</sup> Harvey, Hannah B. and Robinson, Karen, “Hot Bodies on Campus: The Performance of Porn Chic,” p. 70.

<sup>171</sup> Harvey, Hannah B. and Robinson, Karen, “Hot Bodies on Campus: The Performance of Porn Chic,” p. 74.

<sup>172</sup> Bogle, Kathleen A., *Hooking Up: Sex, Dating, and Relationships on Campus* (New York University Press, New York, 2008), p. 104.

or have difficulty getting women to hook up with them).<sup>173</sup> These men are thought to be rare because the commonly held belief is “that men are free to engage in hooking up, including sexual intercourse, with a variety of women without risking their reputation.”<sup>174</sup> Alternate labels for a promiscuous man include “man-whore” or “man-slut.” However, these names are often “used as more of a joke than as a derogatory label per se.”<sup>175</sup>

On the other hand, a woman who is known to be promiscuous is labeled a “slut” and is disrespected by both her female and male peers. Women with this label are “ostracized” and “severely stigmatized for their behavior within the hookup scene.”<sup>176</sup> Often “labeling can affect behavior by altering one’s sense of identity and thereby ultimately creating a self-fulfilling prophecy.”<sup>177</sup> Therefore, those women who are given the “slut” label are more likely to continue their promiscuous behavior in order to further confirm the label. Although these “sluts” are ostracized by their female peers, they also experience negative consequences in their relationships with men. According to one study, “men indicated that they would not be willing to be in a relationship with a woman who has a reputation for being highly sexually active.”<sup>178</sup> Interestingly, even men who rated themselves as highly promiscuous “said they would refuse to be involved with a woman who behaved in the same way.”<sup>179</sup> However, the men were still more than willing to “hook up with a woman who had a bad reputation on campus.”<sup>180</sup> Thus, the double standard is quite apparent on college campuses. It is more than acceptable for men to

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<sup>173</sup> Bogle, Kathleen A., *Hooking Up: Sex, Dating, and Relationships on Campus*, p. 104.

<sup>174</sup> Bogle, Kathleen A., *Hooking Up: Sex, Dating, and Relationships on Campus*, p. 104.

<sup>175</sup> Bogle, Kathleen A., *Hooking Up: Sex, Dating, and Relationships on Campus*, p. 105.

<sup>176</sup> Bogle, Kathleen A., *Hooking Up: Sex, Dating, and Relationships on Campus*, p. 113.

<sup>177</sup> Bogle, Kathleen A., *Hooking Up: Sex, Dating, and Relationships on Campus*, p. 113.

<sup>178</sup> Bogle, Kathleen A., *Hooking Up: Sex, Dating, and Relationships on Campus*, p. 114.

<sup>179</sup> Bogle, Kathleen A., *Hooking Up: Sex, Dating, and Relationships on Campus*, p. 114.

<sup>180</sup> Bogle, Kathleen A., *Hooking Up: Sex, Dating, and Relationships on Campus*, p. 115.

have multiple sexual partners, but women must be careful if they want the chance to form relationships with men on campus.

Although it would seem that the easiest way for college women to avoid the negative consequences of the hookup culture would be to opt out all together, this is truly easier said than done. First of all, men have a position of power in the hookup culture because they are the “initiators of sexual activity”<sup>181</sup> and thus control the extent of relationships. Even though women are known for connecting “sex to romance and are more concerned with affection than sex,”<sup>182</sup> men often seem to be the decision-makers with regard to whether a hookup will turn into a serious relationship. Thus, women “struggle to get the type of relationships they want”<sup>183</sup> because men often avoid emotional connections with the women in this type of relationship. Second, women who partake in the hookup culture may find it difficult to leave because they are “less likely to have other, more emotionally-involved romantic relationship experience.”<sup>184</sup> Therefore, these women are not entirely sure what they are looking for in a relationship and “have little alternate experience to help them desire or work toward another emotionally-involved relationship style.”<sup>185</sup> Basically, women do not opt out of the hookup culture because they do not have another clear-cut alternative. They try to get what they can out of their experiences, but few leave college feeling completely satisfied.

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<sup>181</sup> Paul, Elizabeth L., et al., “Hookups’: Characteristics and Correlates of College Students’ Spontaneous and Anonymous Sexual Experiences,” *The Journal of Sex Research* 37:1 (February 2000), p. 79.

<sup>182</sup> Paul, Elizabeth L., et al., “Hookups’: Characteristics and Correlates of College Students’ Spontaneous and Anonymous Sexual Experiences,” *The Journal of Sex Research* 37:1 (February 2000), p. 79.

<sup>183</sup> Bogle, Kathleen A., *Hooking Up: Sex, Dating, and Relationships on Campus*, p. 125.

<sup>184</sup> Paul, Elizabeth L., et al., “Hookups’: Characteristics and Correlates of College Students’ Spontaneous and Anonymous Sexual Experiences,” *The Journal of Sex Research* 37:1 (February 2000), p. 86.

<sup>185</sup> Paul, Elizabeth L., et al., “Hookups’: Characteristics and Correlates of College Students’ Spontaneous and Anonymous Sexual Experiences,” *The Journal of Sex Research* 37:1 (February 2000), p. 86.

Donna Freitas' book *The End of Sex: How Hookup Culture Is Leaving a Generation Unhappy, Sexually Unfulfilled and Confused About Intimacy* was released in April of this year, and has sparked significant controversy about the college hookup culture. Freitas uses survey data from over 2,500 college students to argue "that young men and women may publicly praise the hookup... but in private they share their ambivalence."<sup>186</sup> Her suggestion that "schools should integrate the study of relationships and sex into the curriculum"<sup>187</sup> has been met with much adversity and numerous articles defending the hookup culture. One such article outlines the "10 Reasons Why Hookup Culture Isn't Leaving a Generation Unhappy and Unfulfilled," and argues that not all students are unhappy with their decision to actively participate in the hookup scene. The ten reasons given are as follows:

- 1) Nobody is an emotional zombie because of hooking up
- 2) Hooking up is just as enjoyable for women as it is for men
- 3) Female agency and upward mobility
- 4) Good relationships can be built out of random hookups
- 5) We're blowing this way out proportion
- 6) You might get better in bed
- 7) You can stumble into really, really good sex
- 8) We're all still getting married

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<sup>186</sup> McKim, Jenifer B., "'The End of Sex' by Donna Freitas," *The Boston Globe*, April 10, 2013 <<http://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/books/2013/04/10/book-review-the-end-sex-donna-freitas/tgZYrhQZ93ea52nVg42wHN/story.html>>.

<sup>187</sup> McKim, Jenifer B., "'The End of Sex' by Donna Freitas," <<http://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/books/2013/04/10/book-review-the-end-sex-donna-freitas/tgZYrhQZ93ea52nVg42wHN/story.html>>.

9) It's not as dangerous as you'd expect

10) It's here to stay<sup>188</sup>

These ten points create a comprehensive argument in favor of the hookup culture and contradict past research on the issue. Focusing on points two, five, and ten offers a different perspective on the topic without having to completely examine each of the ten points.

The explanation of point two cites research conducted in 2009 that found “47 percent of women compared to 37 percent of men expressed some interest in a relationship”<sup>189</sup> after their most recent hookup. These statistics suggest that “widely shared beliefs about gender difference contribute more to gender inequality in college heterosexuality than the substantively small differences in actual preferences.”<sup>190</sup> Many college women would rather not date than participate in the hookup scene. Point five is an interesting one to consider. For most students hookups are very infrequent (averaging one to three times per month<sup>191</sup>), which means the culture is not nearly as out of hand as it is described to be. Perhaps a solution is not necessary if there is no problem to begin with. Finally, point ten makes a bold statement by describing the hookup scene as too intertwined with all other aspects of college life to ever go out of fashion. Since the hookup culture has been able to sustain itself for so long, it must

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<sup>188</sup> McKim, Jenifer B., “‘The End of Sex’ by Donna Freitas,”  
<<http://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/books/2013/04/10/book-review-the-end-sex-donna-freitas/tgZYrhQZ93ea52nVg42wHN/story.html>>.

<sup>189</sup> Hamilton, Laura and Armstrong, Elizabeth A., “Gendered Sexuality in Young Adulthood: Double Binds and Flawed Options,” *Gender & Society* 23:5 (October 2009), p. 609.

<sup>190</sup> Hamilton, Laura and Armstrong, Elizabeth A., “Gendered Sexuality in Young Adulthood: Double Binds and Flawed Options,” p. 609.

<sup>191</sup> McKim, Jenifer B., “‘The End of Sex’ by Donna Freitas,”  
<<http://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/books/2013/04/10/book-review-the-end-sex-donna-freitas/tgZYrhQZ93ea52nVg42wHN/story.html>>.



serve college students “sexually, socially, and politically in some way.”<sup>192</sup>

Whether or not the hookup culture is beneficial is a debate that is not likely to end anytime in the near future. However, it is important to understand that the idea of casual sex with a random stranger may in some way be related to porn culture. Today’s adolescents are becoming familiar with this idea directly through porn viewing as well as through mainstream media consumption. By the time they enter college, many young adults are ready to perform the sexual roles they have been pressured into by their peers and society. In order to truly change the hookup culture on college campuses it would be necessary to begin with altering the sexualized images that children and adolescents are bombarded with on a daily basis. Therefore, point ten is absolutely correct, the hookup culture is not going anywhere anytime soon.

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<sup>192</sup> McKim, Jenifer B., “‘The End of Sex’ by Donna Freitas,”  
<<http://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/books/2013/04/10/book-review-the-end-sex-donna-freitas/tgZYrhQZ93ea52nVg42wHN/story.html>>.

### **Fifty Shades Trilogy**

The release of the *Fifty Shades Trilogy*, a series of erotic romance novels written by E.L. James, marked an unmistakable intersection of porn and mainstream cultures. The first installment in the trilogy, *Fifty Shades of Grey*, was released in May 2011 and quickly became an e-book bestseller. In response to the success of the first book, the second installment, *Fifty Shades Darker*, was released later that same year in September and the final book, *Fifty Shades Freed*, hit the shelves in January 2012. The fact that all three books were released in less than a year demonstrates the trilogy's popularity and the readers' eagerness for more. All three books became #1 *New York Times* Bestsellers and have gained popularity around the world. Currently more than 70 million copies of the books have been sold in their various media forms making the trilogy "one of the fastest-selling book series for any publisher ever."<sup>193</sup>

The trilogy follows the relationship between virginal college student Anastasia Steele and big-time CEO Christian Grey. In *Fifty Shades of Grey*, Anastasia considers agreeing to a contractual dominant-submissive BDSM sexual relationship with Christian. As he introduces her to a sexual world she never knew existed, their relationship becomes solidified and they fall in love. Thus, *Fifty Shades Darker* and *Fifty Shades Freed* are more like romance novels with heavy doses of erotica. Upon reading the first book in the trilogy many readers are shocked by the hard-core porn they find within its

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<sup>193</sup> Trachtenberg, Jeffrey A., "Oh, My! That Dirty Book Has Sold 70 Million Copies," *The Wall Street Journal*, March 26, 2013  
<<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887323466204578384743129294104.html>>.

pages. However, further reading leads to a slight desensitization and an increased interest in the love story that accompanies the highly graphic sexual descriptions.

Based on the “mommy porn”<sup>194</sup> nickname that has been given to the *Fifty Shades Trilogy*, the target audience demographic is obvious. First of all, like most written porn, the books are geared towards women. More specifically, the series is aimed at middle-aged mothers who have careers, husbands, and children. The idea is that the books can offer these women an escape from their busy and hectic lives through the creation of a sexually charged fantasy world. The submission of innocent Anastasia to highly sexualized Christian is “a turn-on for many well-educated suburban women who are empowered economically and enlightened sexually.”<sup>195</sup> Because these women are so in control of every aspect of their lives, the idea of having someone take care of them and tell them what to do is highly appealing. Although it is contrary to the ideals of today’s generation of post-feminists, “the submissive female phenomenon may be linked to women’s rise to economic and political power.”<sup>196</sup> Women who enjoy these books seem to desire the ability to surrender control after taking charge at work, with their children, and in their homes.

The popularity of the series has sparked female interest in pornography and the use of sex toys. The increased consumption of erotic fiction can be explained by the fact

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<sup>194</sup> James, Susan Donaldson, “50 Shades of Grey: Why ‘Mommy Porn’ is Hot,” *ABC News*, April 3, 2012 <<http://abcnews.go.com/Health/50-shades-grey-women-turned-sexual-submission/story?id=16059118#.UXYLOoWmjJ4>>.

<sup>195</sup> James, Susan Donaldson, “50 Shades of Grey: Why ‘Mommy Porn’ is Hot,” <<http://abcnews.go.com/Health/50-shades-grey-women-turned-sexual-submission/story?id=16059118#.UXYLOoWmjJ4>>.

<sup>196</sup> James, Susan Donaldson, “50 Shades of Grey: Why ‘Mommy Porn’ is Hot,” <<http://abcnews.go.com/Health/50-shades-grey-women-turned-sexual-submission/story?id=16059118#.UXYLOoWmjJ4>>.

that the *Fifty Shades Trilogy* is considered mainstream literature. Therefore, the series' shocking rate of sales has made purchasing other erotic novels seem less taboo. Also, the trilogy has normalized BDSM porn to the extent that many women feel comfortable talking with their friends about the scenes they read in the books. Women who would have never ventured into the BDSM world on their own have been given the opportunity to glimpse into a foreign world. Some women even find the BDSM aspects of the series arousing and seek to imitate specific scenes from the books. In fact, a marked "increase in sex toy sales"<sup>197</sup> in recent years can be traced back to the success of the *Fifty Shades Trilogy*. Thanks to these books, many women feel free to explore their sexuality and "play a wide range of sexual adventures."<sup>198</sup>

Even though author E.L. James targets busy middle-aged women, many members of younger generations are also actively enjoying the series. Because the books were originally written as *Twilight* fan-fiction, the *Fifty Shades Trilogy* has caught the attention of many high school girls as well as college-aged adults. The series bears some resemblance to the *Twilight Saga* in terms of characterization, but other than that the two are completely different. If middle-aged women are shocked when flipping through the pages of *Fifty Shades of Grey*, it goes without saying that teenaged girls would be appalled at the pornographic encounters described in the book. Although today's youth is far more sexualized than previous generations, the sexual content of the *Fifty Shades Trilogy* is still beyond comprehension to sexually inexperienced

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<sup>197</sup> Casey, Kathryn, "Is 'Fifty Shades of Grey' Dangerous?" *Forbes*, June 23, 2012  
<<http://www.forbes.com/sites/crime/2012/06/23/is-fifty-shades-of-grey-dangerous/>>.

<sup>198</sup> James, Susan Donaldson, "50 Shades of Grey: Why 'Mommy Porn' is Hot,"  
<<http://abcnews.go.com/Health/50-shades-grey-women-turned-sexual-submission/story?id=16059118#.UXYLOoWmjJ4>>.

teenagers. High school aged girls that read the series run the risk of having distorted views of sexual relationships. Without personal experiences to compare the books to, they might start to believe that dominant-submissive BDSM relationships are the norm. Indeed the popularity of the trilogy further promotes this idea and leaves plenty of room for girls to be confused about what really occurs in healthy sexual relationships.

The financial success of the *Fifty Shades Trilogy* unsurprisingly sparked the interest of many movie production companies. After a bidding battle over the screen rights to *Fifty Shades of Grey*, Universal Pictures beat out the competition. While the film has yet to be officially cast, there is already a tremendous amount of anticipation and fan feedback about it. The decision to produce the film within the limits of an R rating by the Motion Picture Association of America upset many of the books' diehard fans. In all reality a film based on an erotic novel cannot have an R rating and still be true to the contents of the book. Thus, it is understandable that fans are upset about Universal's decision to downplay the pornographic aspects of the book and instead focus on the love story between Anastasia Steele and Christian Grey. However, if the goal is to attract as many moviegoers as possible to the film, any rating more illicit than R would most likely have a negative impact on ticket sales. In today's society there is still a certain amount of stigma attached to NC-17 rated movies, which is demonstrated by the fact that few of them are released in mainstream theatres. It is possible that ticket sales would still be high even if *Fifty Shades of Grey* did receive an NC-17 rating, but clearly Universal Pictures does not want to take that chance.

If it is assumed that the movie will be released with an R rating, many predictions can be made about the impact it will have on society. First of all, undoubtedly there will be high school aged children trying to sneak into theatres to watch the film. Since the release of the movie will be highly media advertised, probably in a manner similar to what was seen for the *Twilight Saga*, one can only hope that theatre personnel will be on the alert for underage viewers. Nevertheless, it is inevitable that teenagers will find a way to watch the movie through other means. This will undoubtedly have negative consequences for these young viewers, as they are not mature enough to fully understand the sexual content of the film. Because Universal will obviously push the R rating to its limits, these children will in effect be blatantly exposed to porn. Although it can be assumed that many of the teenagers who would want to see the film have already had experience with porn, it still has the potential to have harmful lasting effects on their sexuality. Also, the sheer fact that the movie is going to be released in mainstream theatres seems to downplay the pornographic aspect of the story. People will end up seeing the film simply because it is popular and this will promote the normalization of porn that can be seen in today's society. Furthermore, underage adolescents will believe they are justified in wanting to see the film on the basis that everyone else is watching it.

The *Fifty Shades Trilogy* truly represents the phenomenon of pornography becoming mainstream. As millions of readers consume the pornographic material inside the books, they become desensitized to scenes that only a few years ago would have been beyond alarming. While middle-age women seem to be prospering from the books

in terms of actively exploring their sexual desires and feeling comfortable discussing their sexuality, it is important to remember the negative effects they can have on younger generations. The release of the movie adaptation of *Fifty Shades of Grey* will surely mark a shift in what society deems acceptable. Boundaries will be pushed and it will be interesting to see whether society chooses to push back or simply permits porn culture to sink deeper into the mainstream.

## **Social Media**

In the last few years there has been a rapid growth in the number of social media applications. Three such applications that have recently experienced a surge in popularity and perpetuate certain aspects of porn culture are Instagram, Snapchat, and Tinder. The first two are based on the sharing of photos and videos, while the last is a new version of online dating. All three applications are meant for smartphones and focus on physical appearance as the most important aspect of an individual. Although these applications are meant to connect people with similar backgrounds and interests, in reality they often cause social isolation as users rely on cyber connections, which seem less complicated than attempting to connect face-to-face.

Instagram is a photo sharing application that was released in October 2010. Users create a profile that offers very little in the way of personal information, even if they choose to link it to their Facebook account. Basically, a person's profile consists of their chosen username, their posted photos, the number of people who follow them, and the number of people they follow. Other than that no personal information is shared, which allows for a certain degree of anonymity. Users can choose to follow their Facebook friends with Instagram accounts or complete strangers whose pictures they find interesting. Unless a person has made their entire profile private, anyone can view their pictures and also follow their activity. Therefore, there is an enormous amount of interaction with complete strangers on Instagram.

Creating an Instagram profile is very easy and does not have any sort of age requirement. As a consequence of this lack of regulation, many high school students



have become extremely active on Instagram. Specifically, teenaged girls are creating public profiles and posting pictures of themselves at an alarming rate. When a user posts a photo to their profile, other users have the option to either “like” or “comment” on the photo. Thus, these girls are placing themselves into a highly public sphere where they are essentially being judged solely on their appearance. It has become a sort of competition among teenagers to see who can get the most likes on a photo. In order to increase their popularity, female adolescents often take provocative pictures of themselves. This demonstrates that today’s high school students certainly understand the notion that “sex sells.” Indeed, many of the poses utilized by these young women stem directly from pornographic photos. Therefore, teenaged girls are being taught how to present their bodies through positive reinforcement. Posting a seductive photo often leads to more likes, which in turn makes girls more likely to post similar pictures in the future. Although the current media focus is on the posting of these types of images by young girls, certainly their male peers are doing the same. Girls, however, tend to get more attention for their pictures because of the underlying sexual double standard perpetuated by the porn industry.

It is important to consider the effects that Instagram can have on the self-esteem of teenaged girls. It is not uncommon for girls who have public profiles and post provocative photos to receive hundreds, and sometimes thousands, of likes. The ultimate goal of some of these girls is to reach the Instagram “Popular Page.” To do so, a user’s picture must fulfill a number of different criteria relating to the number of followers they have and the percentage that liked or commented on their photo. There

are several articles available online that offer advice on how to make it to the “Popular Page.” Obviously this encourages competition with a user’s anonymous Instagram followers as well as with the followers they actually know. For high school girls who are already focused on comparing themselves to others, this creates a major problem.

Those girls who do receive a significant amount of likes and comments build up a false sense of self-esteem as users only appreciate them for their appearance and nothing else. On the other hand, girls who are not as popular on Instagram are left with a lowered sense of self-worth as they compare themselves to their more popular peers.

Clearly the porn industry’s ideal of the perfect female body is perpetuated through Instagram activity. It can be assumed that the popular girls have body types more similar to the porn star ideal than girls who are less popular. Also, the popular girls know how to display their bodies in a pornographic way that promotes the objectification of the female body.

Instagram offers a way for people to communicate on a superficial level that allows for a certain amount of anonymous flirting. Users often comment back and forth on each other’s photos, which can lead to a false sense of familiarity. It is clearly not possible to truly know much about someone when the only context for getting to know him or her is what you see in photos. Regardless, users sometimes take their Instagram relationships to the next level and start communicating via other forms of social media. In a sense, it is possible for Instagram to be viewed as a tool to facilitate both online dating and the hookup culture. For this reason, many parents would be shocked to know

that their teenaged kids are participating in a world that promotes objectification as well as interaction between total strangers.

Snapchat is another application that has experienced a recent surge in popularity. It was released in September 2011 and allows users to share photos as well as videos. Snapchat accounts are created using a person's phone number and "friends" are established through the contacts saved on a user's phone. Therefore, the interactions on Snapchat are more familiar than those on Instagram as you must know the other person well enough to have their phone number. Once a user takes a picture or video, they choose which of their friends to send it to and also how long their friends will be able to view it. Both photos and videos can be viewed for a maximum of ten seconds. After the chosen time period has elapsed, the photo/video is erased and cannot be accessed again. The one caveat is that a screen shot of a Snapchat from another user can be taken, although an alert is sent to the sender of the Snapchat informing them that their friend has taken a screen shot. Therefore, it is easy to know which pictures other users have saved.

The fact that most images are erased after ten seconds makes Snapchat the perfect application for "sexting" (sending sexually explicit text messages back and forth with a partner). Many people are uncomfortable with sending provocative pictures via text message because they know that the images can be saved and viewed again later. However, the limited access to pictures offered by Snapchat makes users slightly more courageous when sending seductive pictures. Knowing that the person who receives their Snapchat will not have the time to scrutinize every aspect of their body, many

users are willing to take pictures of themselves that they would normally feel very uncomfortable taking. Again, many of the poses utilized for sexting via Snapchat originate from porn culture. Women focus heavily on the parts of their body that are objectified in porn, while men mainly focus on their genitals.

Snapchat may not lead to self-esteem issues per se, as it does not have a way to judge the pictures and videos of others. However, it does promote a very superficial type of communication. Users can include short messages in their Snapchats to others, but the focus is definitely on visual communication. Thus, a sort of self-selection process occurs in that people with low self-esteem probably choose not to use Snapchat at all. Those who do utilize the application further increase their self-esteem by receiving Snapchats from their friends. It definitely promotes a sense of narcissism as users communicate mainly through pictures of themselves in various locations and participating in different events. Communication through appearance is much more important in the world of Snapchat than actually having a conversation with another person.

Both Instagram and Snapchat have recently received media attention as they were connected to a sexting scandal at a New Jersey high school. The administrators at Ridgewood High School found “images of real or simulated sex acts and photos of naked or semi-naked”<sup>199</sup> students that were circulated through the smartphone applications. According to New Jersey Statute 2C:24-4, Endangering the Welfare of Children, “students who possess or transmit sexually revealing or explicit images could

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<sup>199</sup> Katz, Rachel, “N.J. High School Students Could Be Charged With Possessing Child Pornography,” *ABC News*, March 15, 2013 <<http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/headlines/2013/03/n-j-high-school-students-could-be-charged-with-possessing-child-pornography/>>.

be charged with possession of child pornography."<sup>200</sup> Authorities hope that drawing attention to the issue of sexting at Ridgewood will persuade parents across America to talk to their children about the consequences of sharing explicit images with others. It is important for children to understand that the decisions they made now can and will affect them for the rest of their lives. Clearly Instagram and Snapchat have the potential to help fuel the hyper-sexualization of children in today's society. Many users of these two applications are sexually immature and unable to truly understand what they are doing. Basically, social media applications like Instagram and Snapchat promote the formation of a youth generation that appears physically mature, but remains mentally and emotionally naïve.

Tinder, an online dating application, was released in August 2012 and has become increasingly popular in the recent months. Though marketed as an online dating application, it is mainly a tool used to aid the hookup culture. Tinder is set up to connect to a person's Facebook account in order to generate their profile. Users only make two choices when searching for potential matches: the gender they are seeking and the distance they would like to search. Once these parameters are established, users can begin looking through the profiles of people who match their criteria. A person's profile includes their name, age, distance away, and most importantly, a few pictures. Although mutual interests and friends are also listed, the focus is clearly on the pictures. The application randomly selects one profile at a time for users to view. In order to get to the next person's profile, users must either "swipe to the left," indicating

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<sup>200</sup> Katz, Rachel, "N.J. High School Students Could Be Charged With Possessing Child Pornography," <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/headlines/2013/03/n-j-high-school-students-could-be-charged-with-possessing-child-pornography/>.

that they are not interested, or “swipe to the right,” indicating that they are. Basically, the application asks you to make quick judgments about people based solely on their appearance in a few photos. A user will only be notified of a match if a person they swiped to the right also indicates an interest in them. Thus, the attraction must be mutual for a match to take place. Once a match has been made, users have the ability to communicate with each other through the application’s chat feature.

Since Tinder facilitates the hookup culture, most communication between matched users revolves around the logistics of meeting up for a random hookup. Because very little personal information is available on a Tinder profile, it encourages the dehumanizing aspect of the hookup culture. People who match on Tinder and subsequently meet for a hookup are literally agreeing to sexual interaction with a body rather than a person, which leads to an entirely emotionless sexual experience. This promotes the porn industry’s idea of sex for the sole purpose of physical pleasure. While people who choose to participate in Tinder hookups are most likely getting the sexual satisfaction they crave, they may be setting themselves up for relationship problems in the future. If sex for them is always linked only to physical pleasure, it is very likely that they will have a difficult time being emotionally intimate during sex. The popularity of Tinder suggests that many young people today are very interested in strictly physical relationships. As the hookup culture continues to be promoted, people may become increasingly detached and have difficulty connecting with others on an emotional level.

All three smartphone applications contribute to the sexual desensitization of mainstream culture. The focus on physical appearance is obvious and can lead to

decreased feelings of self-worth among users. The influence of the porn industry is apparent in the way people pose in their photos and the sexual flirting that occurs within the applications. Today's youth is particularly affected by these applications because they lack the maturity level needed to fully understand the consequences of their actions. Although posting a picture on Instagram, sending a ten second clip via Snapchat, and flirting on Tinder may all seem harmless, they teach users to focus solely on physical presentation. Therefore, adolescents who actively use these applications run the risk of losing their ability to communicate and express themselves emotionally.

## Social Isolation at Boston College

The mainstreaming of porn culture has the potential to create an overall feeling of social isolation within society. At a time when social media allows for an unprecedented amount of communication, it seems strange that its usage often results in many people feeling very alone. The current focus on means of non-verbal communication may be a key reason why many young adults have difficulty establishing meaningful relationships and instead look to the hookup culture. College campuses have become prime locations for this feeling of isolation because of the prevalence of social media in everyday life. On the Boston College campus in particular, there are three aspects of social life that demonstrate how porn culture leads to social detachment: BC Confessions, the BC look-away, and the Senior Five.

BC Confessions is a student-operated Facebook page that was started in February of this year and has recently seen a tremendous surge in popularity. Currently it has 3,780 followers,<sup>201</sup> although not all are BC students. Facebook users can post anonymous confessions through a survey application that is linked to the page. The student administrators of the page then select the confessions they deem most appropriate based on a list of criteria they invented. Posts are made to the page on a fairly regular basis and vary in subject matter. However, when scrolling through the most recent posts it is nearly impossible to not find one that mentions a student's unhappiness with the hookup culture on campus. Many students talk about their desire for a boyfriend/girlfriend but how they feel like they will never find one because they do not participate in the popular hookup culture. Others will discuss past hookups and how

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<sup>201</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/BostonCollegeConfessions?fref=ts>



they found them to be emotionally unsatisfying. In some instances students refer to the ways in which the hookup culture encourages students to treat each other with disrespect.

The sense that one gets from reading the posts on BC Confessions is that many students on campus would like an alternative to the hookup culture. However, the anonymity of the posts demonstrates the discomfort students feel when admitting to their unhappiness. Today's hyper-sexualized society, encouraged by porn culture, places a lot of pressure on college students to enjoy their four years of casual sex. This makes it difficult for students to opt out of the hookup culture because they feel like they are not getting the full college experience they have heard so much about. BC Confessions makes it clear that students are unhappy with the shallow relationships of the hookup culture. Many yearn for something more but do not know how to express their desires without facing social rejection from their peers. Therefore, students feel socially isolated from their casual sex partners as well as from their friends. Without the support of these two groups of people, students can become emotionally detached.

The BC look-away is a consequence of the prevalent hookup culture on campus. It happens when two acquaintances are walking towards each other in a public area and pretend not to know each other by turning their face away and walking by without any sort of acknowledgement. Although this can occur between two people who vaguely know one another from class and other casual settings, it is extremely common among people who have hooked up. Often the BC look-away will start the week after a weekend hookup and will continue indefinitely. Basically, students do not want to

acknowledge their weekend behaviors in any other setting. In this way many students lead a sort of double-life. They are studious and polite during the week while they attend classes, but are rowdy during weekend parties. There is definitely a significant amount of effort that goes into keeping these two lives separate and the BC look-away is just one example.

As students continue to maintain two distinct lives, it is difficult for them to establish relationships with their casual sex partners. The BC look-away indicates that students feel a certain amount of shame about participating in the hookup culture. Whether they are ashamed of the person they hooked up with or the act itself, they do not want the public to know what they do behind closed doors. If students cannot even talk with their sex partners in public without fear of being found out, then they clearly have no chance at forming a meaningful relationship. This is the reason why many hookup partners are not friends outside of their casual sex encounters. Students' inability to be emotionally intimate with the people they are most physically intimate with clearly has its consequences. The social isolation created by the hookup culture and maintained by actions such as the BC look-away may make it difficult for some students to establish stable relationships after college.

The Senior Five is another aspect of BC's social atmosphere that stems from the hookup culture. Basically, seniors make a list of the top five people they would want to hookup with before graduating. They can then choose to anonymously submit their list, by creating an alias email address, to the Senior Five Facebook page<sup>202</sup> where they have the opportunity to be matched with the people on their list. The idea is that if two

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<sup>202</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/BCSenior5?fref=ts>

people match they will meet up for a one-time hookup in order to check each other off their list. For the most part a person's Senior Five list is solely based on looks, although it can be assumed that some are based on additional factors. Regardless, the goal is to have casual sex with one of the people on your list and then move onto the next. Clearly these hookups are emotion-free and meant to be a last-ditch effort to have sex with the people you missed out on during your four years at Boston College.

An important aspect of the Senior Five Facebook page is that others, while anonymous, can see people's posts. Therefore, a person's presence on the lists of other students has the potential to affect their self-esteem. For example, those students who appear on many lists most likely feel a strange sense of accomplishment and a boost to their self-image. Many of these popular students probably adhere to the standards of attractiveness defined by porn culture and mainstream media. Students who, on the other hand, are nowhere to be found on the page probably feel very unwanted and left out of the Senior Five experience. This can lead to a feeling of social isolation from their senior peers during a time when class bonding is particularly important. The Senior Five serves to create a rift between those students who are considered physically attractive and popular by others and those who are not. Although it is not entirely clear what percentage of the senior class actively participates in the Senior Five experience, it is definitely something that a large majority of senior students know about. Whether they look at the Facebook page hoping to see their name and arrange for a subsequent hookup or just find the whole idea humorous and entertaining, it is a topic that frequently comes up among BC students.

These three aspects Boston College social life relate directly to the normalization of porn culture. The BC Confessions page demonstrates the feeling of dissatisfaction felt by many students in regards to the prevalent hookup culture. The BC look-away facilitates separation between a person's everyday life and their sex life, similar to what is seen among consumers of porn. Lastly, the Senior Five exists to give students one last chance to have a casual hookup with people they find sexually desirable. Although this discussion focuses on the Boston College campus specifically, a number of articles on college dating and sexuality indicate that students at other colleges engage in similar behaviors. College students across the country feel pressured to participate in the hookup culture and face similar feelings of social isolation as a result.

## Conclusion

Based on the financial success of the porn industry and the corporations that utilize its marketing tools, it is safe to assume that porn is here to stay. If pornographic images continue to be accepted by society, it may come to the point that mainstream culture and porn culture are indistinguishable from each other. Advertisements in magazines will look like pages out of a porn magazine and blockbuster films will include porn-grade sex scenes. And at that point it will most likely be too late for society to change.

Human sexuality will undoubtedly be affected by the constant exposure to sexual images. As more and more images of the porn industry's standard of beauty are pumped into mainstream culture, women will continue to feel pressured to have the ideal body type depicted in various media formats. This will make them extremely susceptible to the advertisement ploys of beauty products that promise desirable results. Furthermore, men will come to expect women to look a certain way and may have a difficult time being aroused by everyday women who do not have porn star bodies.

The hookup culture will most likely continue in much the same way as it does today, especially if porn culture becomes more mainstream. Even if one school, like Boston College, decided to change its social structure, a mass nationwide movement would be needed to completely reform a culture that has been self-sustaining for so long. Although many students are unhappy with the pressure they feel to participate in the hookup culture, there are also many who are perfectly happy with the way things

are. As far as Boston College is concerned, it does not seem necessary to fix the hookup culture itself. Rather, there needs to exist other options for students who wish to opt out. That way the students who are happy with the hookup culture could still carry on and other students would still have access to socially rewarding experiences.

With the upcoming release of the *Fifty Shades of Grey* film, it will become necessary for government agencies to redefine what they consider obscene. In order to protect young viewers from the possible negative consequences of becoming habituated to pornographic material, further regulations need to be put in place. It is also the responsibility of parents to know what their children are viewing. Whether kids are surfing the web, watching television, or liking photos on Instagram, it is important that parents step in to prevent the hyper-sexualization of their children.

Most importantly, it is necessary to understand that pornography is not inherently bad for society. Rather, it is the misuse and ease of access that create issues. In its proper place and in moderation porn can be beneficial and improve people's sex lives. Therefore, this paper does not argue for the abolition of pornography. Instead, it encourages readers to take a critical look at the ways in which porn culture affects their lives. The first step in improving America's hyper-sexualized society is to acknowledge the prevalence of porn culture in everyday life. Only then can further steps be made to target the negative effects of excessive exposure to sexually explicit material.

By reassessing the influence and infiltration of pornography into American society, it may be possible to improve some of the major issues. For instance, it is important to be proactive about the behavior of both children and young adults in terms

of their attire and Internet usage. One way to do this is by focusing on the importance of developing meaningful relationships in person that emphasize getting to know as much as possible about someone rather than relying primarily on physical appearance.

Prioritizing the education of younger generations could help to reduce the negative effects of pornography in the future, as they will be able to understand the ways in which porn affects their everyday lives. With this knowledge, members of younger generations can then decide how they wish to proceed in their social relationships.

Although many young adults will still choose to participate in the hookup culture, giving them the knowledge to truly understand what they are a part of will lead to a stronger sense of self-awareness. This could make it easier for those who are unhappy with random hookups to opt out of the culture entirely, which ultimately could make it easier for them to form intimate relationships. Most importantly, people need to be aware of the current mainstreaming of porn culture in order to combat its effects. Only by truly understanding the far-reaching consequences of pornification can society start on the path towards finding a solution.

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