

WARNING: *This paper contains topics that could be triggering to someone who has been sexually assaulted. Read at your own risk.*

Rape culture is ingrained in our society. One in five U.S. women are raped or attempted rape victims throughout the span of their lives and one in four women are raped while at a four year college. Rape has become such a norm that the victim is often blamed for the crime and told they are “asking for it” rather than getting the support they need. If so many people are getting rape everyday and 97% of rapists spend no time in prison, then what is the underlying problem? Living in an era where a whole porn universe is at our fingertips, the average age that a boy starts watching porn is 11.5. In a world where porn has become the new sex-ed, what is the correlation between rape culture and pornography? ¹

First we have to ask the question, what effect does watching porn have on young boys’s sexual tendencies? The fact of the matter is that the vast majority of rapists are not sex craved lunatics hiding in an ally waiting to grab a random girl and rape her out of sexual frustration. Eight out of ten rapes occur between people who know each other or have preexisting relationships, so the problem is not a certain type of person who is born violent and deprived of sex². The problem is the way young boys are taught about sex. Boys grow up seeing the abusive power dynamic they witness in these videos and become desensitized to it. How are these boys *not* supposed to interpret these feelings and videos as reality?

According to Gail Dines, a specialist in the study of pornography, within the 304 scenes of the top selling pornographic movies, 88.2% contained physical aggression and 48.7% contained verbal aggression towards women.³ In Dines’s documentary *Pornland: How the Porn Industry has Hijacked our Sexuality*, she shows some of the violent scenes that are far too easy to find. Within the documentary, Dines also shows how young boys watch these women get harrassed and violated in horrific ways and think that is how sex is and what brings women pleasure. These films not only put the wrong ideas into adolescents heads, but they deemphasize the severity of rape by depicting women getting raped and enjoying it. Dines states that 36% of the interent is pornography and its all within the reach to inquisitive children who have had no education and are curious about sex. What these children see is processed as normal due to their lack of experience and/or knowledge.

The videos aren’t only harmful to women. The boys are held to high, hyper masculine stereotypes and told on the websites that if they aren’t into the content of the degrading videos, they aren’t real men⁴. When young, insecure men see their masculinity being challenged, it should come as no surprise that they will watch the videos to try to be like the rest of their “bros”. Many of the websites manipulate men into watching the most horrific videos by praying upon their masculinity and telling them what they should and shouldn’t like.

Girls aren’t only being negatively affected by having to deal with the negative tactics boys learn from porn. The videos depict women unrealistically both in how they look and how they should act sexually which sets unrealistic standards for young girls. The majority of women in most pornographic videos have unrealistically large breasts and small waists. Now men aren’t the only ones exposed to porn at an early age, girls have a 60% chance of being exposed to porn before the age of 18⁵. These girls see these women who are deemed “fuckable” and think that is

¹ Williams, Reagan. "rape culture." Tedx , 3 Apr. 2017, Arkansas State U. Speech)

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³ *Pornland*, 2

⁴ *Pornland*

⁵ Prevent Child Abuse America. "Understanding the Effects of Pornography on Children." Prevent Child Abuse America, 2019, preventchildabuse.org/

what will make them have value⁶. Porn isn't the only industry to blame for this message. Girls are constantly being bombarded with images and messages in the media on how they should look and what is considered hot, but porn shouts the message loud and clear in a way that infiltrates how girls view their hotness in relationship to their value as a person, not to mention their sexual experiences. It should be no surprise then that cosmetic surgery rates for girls under the age of 18 has doubled since 1992⁷. Not only are girls increasingly more selfconscious about how they look through the eyes of their sexual partners, but a survey showed that 62% of 10-16 year olds say they were pressured into sex at a younger age because of the media⁸. Porn obviously isn't the main culprit in this depressing statistic but when girls see other women in pornography hyper sexualized and viewed as sex objects rather than people, it adds to the same exploitive environment.

Mainstream porn is mostly targeted towards a male audience so it is unsurprising that the girls main duty in the videos is to make the man feel good. Girls see this and think that's what they should do which contributes to a culture of casual hookups that are only beneficial to the man. I see this especially in highschool hookup culture. Most often hookups go a little something like this:

Girl (lets call her Kate) starts talking to boy (let's call him Tim.) Kate and Tim Snapchat for a little while. The Snapchats continue to get increasingly more provocative until he sends her an unsolicited picture of his penis. They continue to talk and they occasionally walk each other to class, making small talk about homework, sports and other dull high school topics until Tim eventually asks Kate to hang out after school. They start watching a movie which eventually turns into them making out. Kate is nervous because she hasn't ever been with someone and Tim is ever so confident. It only takes a gentle head push from Tim to inform Kate on what she's expected to do. After she gives him a blow job, they sit back on the couch and continue watching the movie. Kate is unaware she has just been oppressed by a culture that expects women to do something for the man. Of course, Tim didnt even think of trying to make Kate feel good because that is not what his sex education taught him.

You might wonder, how could a nice boy like Tim could watch people get hurt and violated in such an extreme way and not have any empathy? The viewers of the hardcore porn don't look at the girls getting abused and think of them like their girlfriends and sisters⁹. The people watching porn think the women in the videos deserve their treatment because they signed up for it. The women in the videos are disassociated from other women by calling them "whores," "sluts," and "cum dumpsters" and claiming the women deserve what they're getting. Little do they know that the girls they see in porn are much like any other girl. In many of the violent scenes, young girls fresh into the industry feel as if they don't have the right to say no so many of the scenes are actually more authentic than they are purported to be¹⁰. Even if the actors are fully consenting, the actors do not get a fair amount of money considering their video can be the most popular scene on pornhub and the actor can still only get \$1,200 total¹¹. The amature

⁶ Pornland

⁷ *What a Girl Wants*. Produced by Elizabeth Massie, 2001.

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⁹ Pornland

¹⁰ *Hot Girls Wanted*

¹¹ Khalifa, Mia. Interview. 7 Sept. 2019.

porn stars get even less, an average of \$800 per shoot¹². Although this seems like easy money to the performers in the moment, many of the performers have to pay for many of the extra medical care they need due to their physically demanding jobs. Even if you don't consider their stack of medical bills, most often the performers don't have a lawyer going into the business and once (and if) they leave, the video stays online forever. Now I am no stranger to the lack of privacy online. I know that once a video is out it is out for good, this means these adult film actors cannot control how the world sees them once they sign a contract. These actors aren't people to the majority of the industry, they are money making machines. The more views the video gets, the more money the company makes yet the performer doesn't get an extra dime.

The porn industry, much like the viewers, is not concerned about the actors. This was made clear when Measure B, a law forcing all actors to wear condoms throughout the filming process, was first proposed. The law was passed but there was a lot of pushback from the adult film industry. The industry claimed that their right to freedom of expression was being violated by the law, despite all the health issues the actors have had to face due to the lack of condoms. The fact that the industry was so opposed to a law that was meant to protect the safety of the actors shows how little the industry cares about the wellbeing of their performers. The most popular videos involve ejaculation. Condoms would mean a lot less views and so, a lot less money for the industry. Not only is this an unsafe work environment for the performers, but adolescents watch these scenes and don't think protection is needed during coitus. Additionally, said scenes that involve forms of ejaculating onto women the viewer could then apply this act to their sexual habits and degrade or traumatize someone they actually care about.

Now I don't think porn should not exist, I believe there is a place for it but i find it difficult to support the mainstream companies that are fueled by toxic male masculinity and are caked in misogyny. I have a hard time believing that that the violent, dehumanizing videos are just a sexual preference considering the historic record of women getting sexually abused. This history of sexual violence towards women is now being eroticized and exploited in order to satisfy an audience of mostly men who have been born into this oppressive culture. There is obviously a parralel between these violent videos and the fact that so many women are being forced into nonconsensual sex¹³.

Conner Habib, a sex workers' rights advocate, wrote an opinion piece in the newspaper, *The Stranger*, titled, "If You're Against Sex Work, You're a Bigot." Habib made some very interesting points about how many anti sex work advocates are in fact, dehumanizing the workers by devalueing their work¹⁴. I can see why sex workers are frustrated with the stigma they have to face and the lack of rights they get with their work. The issue isn't with the performers, it's with the industry. I understand how not all porn sets are dimly lit with shady directors who force vulnerable women into doing things they don't want to do. Although there are many women who have been exploited in the industry, there are also women in the (sex work) industry who maintain their agency and are treated with respect. Sex doesn't mean the same thing for everyone. Habib made a great point when he stated that to some people consent can be as easy as the exchange of money. This is true, however, it is hard to turn a blind eye on a

¹² *Hot girls wanted*

¹³ *Opinion piece by yours truly*

¹⁴ Habib, Conner. "If You're Against Sex Work, You're a Bigot." *The Stranger* [Seattle], 24 Jan. 2015. *The Stranger*, www.thestranger.com/features/feature/2015/06/24/22436683/if-youre-against-sex-work-youre-a-bigot.

multi billion dollar industry that capitalizes on young actors who have no control of their image once a video is released. I think porn stars should have more legal rights so the power dynamic is equalled out a bit. Habib also made the argument that anti porn advocators are fabricating a world where porn is destroying everything and the real issue is stigmatizing the workers. The truth is I've seen teenage boys first hand refer to the online porn world for experience in their future sexual endeavours. Porn is a strong influencer for young boys and a lot of the content tends to misrepresent realistic sex. Although the videos have a negative impact on the perception of sex, we should be careful not to stigmatize the actors in the industry. Furthermore by recognizing and respecting sex workers, perhaps the videos would adopt this new respect and consent.

The porn industry is operating within a capitalist society, so of course the industry wants to make money and how it does that is by continuing to put out videos that meet the suppliers demands. Many of the demands of the viewers have been proven to be harmful to society as a whole, due to the accessibility of the videos and unrealistic representations of sex. I think the porn industry should have stricter regulations regarding how accessible their videos are. I believe if the only videos that were very accessible to the public were fully consenting adults without violence, the proper representation of sex would improve how young people view sex. I also think that the industry needs to protect its workers by protecting their privacy, giving them more rights, and paying them properly. We can't rely on a fantasy concocted to please men to teach adolescents about sex. At this point, what we are seeing isn't freedom of speech, it's explicitly violent content that is all too accessible to innocent, curious children. We need to regulate the porn industry and hold it accountable for creating videos that are seeping into our culture and diseasing the minds of adolescents.