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Misogynistic Machines

The internet provides a vast amount of resources to aid individuals in obtaining information, but the internet also has a dark side. With unlimited websites and chat rooms, the internet gives many people an escape from the dull real world. Being naive, people believed that the internet would connect us through our differences, but after being exposed to these vast chat rooms that hide one's identity, people started to tear each other down. In Laurie Penny's *Cybersexism*, she says, "This is for everyone. Or at least, it was supposed to be" (Penny, 254). Women are one of the largest groups on the internet to be discriminated against. For many, the internet was their first experience with sexual harassment at an impressionable young age. Exposure to provocative content at such a young age completely alters how someone grows up. The consequences of exposure to this inappropriate content are lifelong mental illnesses and body insecurities. Sexual harassment online causes children to develop hypersexual tendencies, such as sexting or actively looking for someone who finds them desirable.

Overexposure to sexual content completely alters the lives of young women nationwide. Many young women's first taste of sexual harassment comes from the internet. Grown men target girls as young as twelve years old online by sexualizing their innocence and youth. Many young girls who have not experienced the harshness of the real world do not understand the severity of interacting with older male individuals online. These children are manipulated into sharing inappropriate images or videos back and forth with their abusers. Studies show “... the sharing of images online/offline by the offender was reported by 21.6% of victims of online sexual abuse” (Calvete, etal). When an adult initiates sexual interactions, such as sharing images or videos, the child believes those actions are acceptable. The reasoning behind this could be that "...adolescents engaging in problematic Internet use could be more vulnerable such that, when exposed to sexual requests, their preference for online relationships and their emotional difficulties could put them at higher risk of responding by engaging in sexualized interactions with adults and even increasing their sexting behaviors with other people." (Calvete, etal). Often, the victims are shamed into performing these acts because the abusers preach that it is something everyone their age is doing. Sharing obscene images, such as nudes, can drastically affect the future of these young women. Without any guidance on the internet, these young girls are groomed into the "ideal partner" for these incels targeting them. Incels, or "sexist trolls," as Laurie Penny likes to call them, are men who are "involuntarily celibate" or blame women for their lack of sexual intercourse (Tranchese and Sugiura). Incels make it their job to discourage women from accessing the internet because they feel threatened by the female presence. These torments consist of sexual threats or threats of blackmailing women in high power into silence. Tranchese and Sugiura's article says, "This policing of women's behavior functions as a reminder of who is in control and who dictates the boundaries within which women are free to move" (Tranchese and Sugiura). By targeting girls at a young age, incels can assert dominance much earlier, which gives them the "power" to control who is in charge of the internet. Having all eyes on them and being constantly sexualized, women develop morphed ideas of who they are meant to be and allow the continuation of being sexualized through the male gaze.

Young women are victims of the harsh sexualization caused by the pressure of maintaining status on social networks. Studies show that young girls who are more active on social networking sites are more likely to develop body image problems, unlike those who are less active on social media. Today, if one does not have a social media account, they are nobody; they simply do not exist. To the newest generation, their social media accounts dictate their every move. Likes and comments are among the top issues when dealing with the in-depth media world. An article shows that "... teenage girls see the number of likes received as indicative of their beauty and self-worth, and also adopt strategies to get more likes" (Longobardi, Fabris, Prino, Settanni, 53). Teenagers will expose themselves in pictures to send to friends, classmates, or partners to obtain more likes and followers on social networks such as Instagram. This is derived from the idea that more likes on a post mean that person is attractive and popular, and these kids will do anything for a like. Penny's *Cybersexism* says, "... giving anyone a picture of your breasts, whether a lover or a listed corporation, gives them power over you" (Penny 258). Being unaware of the consequences of the internet, many young girls do not understand that it is permanent once you send or post a picture online. Unfortunately, research shows that "... teenage girls with body image concerns are more inclined to engage in risky online behavior, which in turn can increase the risk of online victimization…" (Longobardi, Fabris, Prino, Settanni, 58). The rate of filthy men waiting to take advantage of these girls' insecurities is alarming and unmonitored on the internet.

Grown men target girls and women with insecurities and body dysmorphia to manipulate them into performing sexual acts against their will. Behind a screen, men create false personas of their ideal man to deceive women into engaging with them (Byerly). Byerly writes that men "Alter their appearance to be better looking” (Byerly). The tactic of acting as the "perfect" man gets women and girls to send them sexual pictures or videos for their pleasure. Typically, these men targeting women are significantly older than their targets, which allows men to talk down on them, cracking down on the woman's confidence so the men can persuade them to do unthinkable acts. Studies show that when exposed to this type of abuse, "Online sexual abuse has been associated with severe consequences for the mental health of the victims, including depression and post-traumatic stress" (Calvete, etal). Sexual exposure completely alters the personalities and lives of the victims on the internet.

The internet is full of questionable content in the reach of young, impressionable minds. No matter their age, anyone can go on a free website and access pornographic images or videos at any time of the day or night. The issue is that many prepubescent children have unmonitored internet use, allowing them to stumble onto one of these sites. Tranchese and Sugiura's article expresses that "... frequent exposure to pornography increases the likelihood of engagement in risky sexual behaviors, self-objectification, and endorsement of rape myths" (Tranchese and Sugiura). Children are already the targets of sexual predators online, and exposing them to graphic content puts them at a higher risk of falling victim to these monsters. Not only does pornography put children at a higher risk of being sexually assaulted, but it also changes their views on their bodies and sexuality, especially in young women. New categories of pornography that objectify women have become normalized in online society. An article shows, "’gonzo’ pornography, ‘which depicts hard-core, body-punishing sex in which women are demeaned and debased’ —have exacerbated the normalization of the dehumanization of women" (Tranchese and Sugiura). This normalization of aggressive pornography towards females has conditioned women to view themselves as objects whose only purpose is to please men. When women only view themselves as objects, they care little about their safety, leading to sexually transmitted diseases, getting assaulted or raped, or even killed. Objectifying women does not stop on the internet; it is just the start for many women in the war on sexual harassment.

The internet has gone through many changes since it was first developed. No one could expect the horrors that would come from this application and how it would single-handedly change the world. For many women, their lives will never return to what they once were before the time of the internet. So many children were stripped of their innocence by incels who could not fathom being overlooked by the female population. For the pathetic men who did not have the backbone to say anything in person, "The internet made misogyny routine and sexual bullying easy..." (Penny 257). Underlining hatred for women will forever be embedded in these misogynistic machines.

Reference

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