

MODERN DAY SLAVES

Confronting consumer culture

By NATALIE WILLIS

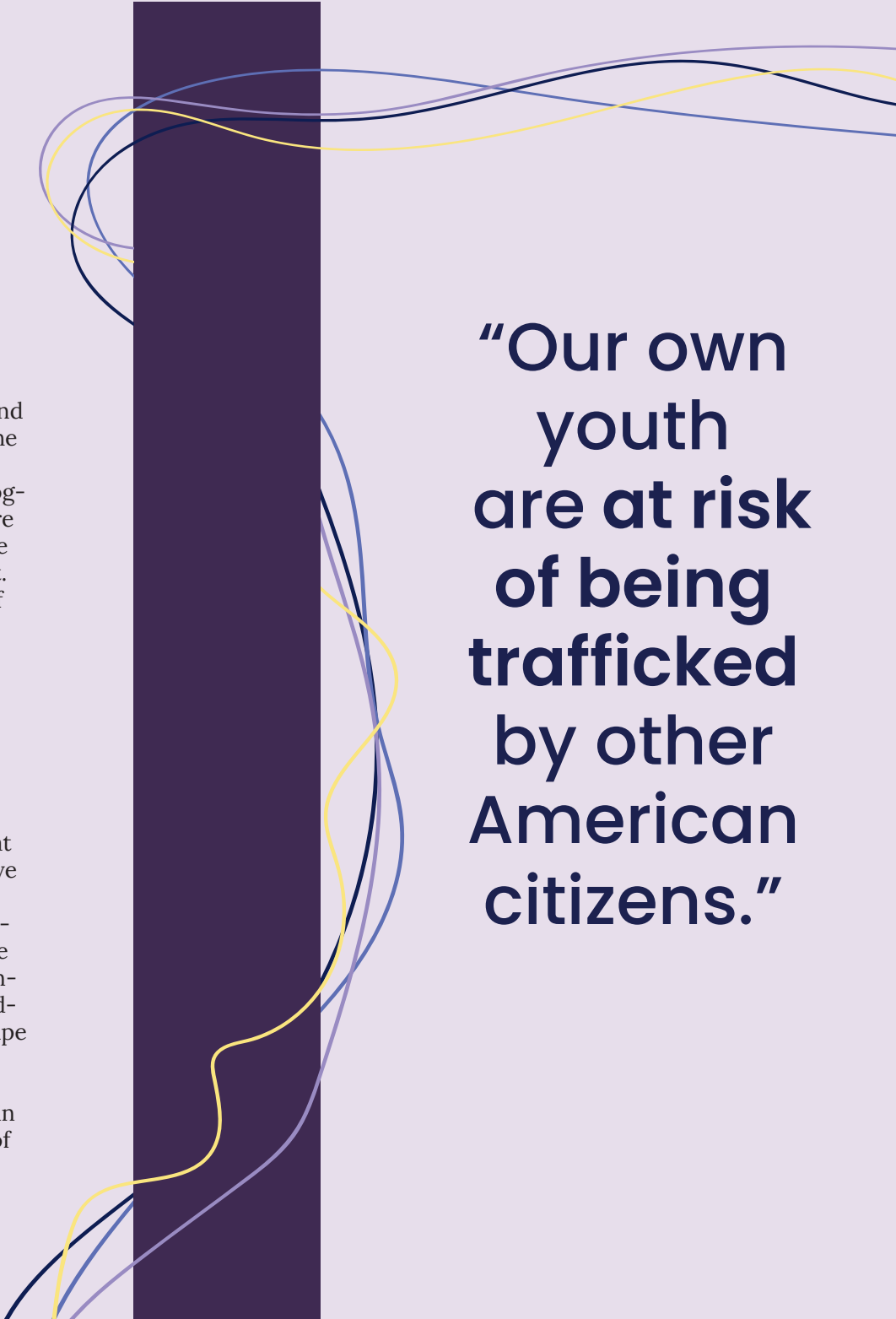
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Millions of people watched the sexual assault of a 14-year-old girl. Rose Kalembe was captured, stabbed and raped by two men for 12 hours. The entire assault was uploaded onto Pornhub, the largest digital pornography platform in the world, where it remained for six months despite Rose's pleas for them to remove it. On Pornhub, the various videos of her rape were titled 'teen crying and getting slapped around' and 'teen getting destroyed.' Pornhub only took down the videos of her assault after she impersonated a lawyer.

While Rose's assault happened in 2009, it was not until last year that it gained coverage due to her brave decision to tell her story to BBC News. Since then, many other survivors have come forward to share their stories and expose how Pornhub and its parent company, Mind-Geek, having profited off of the rape and trafficking of minors. While survivors are beginning to share their stories, they are just a drop in the bucket of a major enterprise of exploitation.



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The global fight against human trafficking has inspired many individuals to take a stand in their community. Despite there being several nonprofits against trafficking in the United States, America has become a hotspot for trafficking, according to Megan Yoshihara, the Assistant Director of Survivor Advocacy at Unbound Ministries.

“We’ve seen a shift from the U.S. being a destination country to more of a source and transit country,” Yoshihara said. “Our own youth are at risk of being trafficked by other American citizens.”

Human trafficking is much more complex than what movies like “Taken” portray. While forced trafficking experiences like Liam Neeson’s on-screen daughter do happen, modern trafficking is facilitated mainly through fraud and coercion. The pornography industry depends upon manipulative tactics to get the amount of performers needed, according to Lisa Thompson, Vice President and Director of the National Center of Sexual Exploitation Research Institute.

Giant companies like Pornhub and MindGeek do not verify the age of the participants in the trafficking videos that are sent. Instead, they tag and title these non-consensual videos in order to eventually decriminalize rape. Furthermore, they encourage the trafficking of victims for content and utilize predatory practices to manipulate them into performing. Recently, a case against a former partner program of MindGeek, Girls Do



Porn, was filed for targeting and luring women under the false pretence of a modeling job before informing them that it was a porn shoot.

“A lot of the time, these are young women maybe fresh out of high school or in college, they don’t have a lot of worldly experience, they feel a tremendous amount of pressure, and you have all of these manipulative tactics coming at you and flat out lies,” Thompson said.

To coerce women to participate, Girls Do Porn assured them they would be provided anonymity and the videos would be released on foreign markets, not America. The women were pressured into signing documents and could not leave or receive payment until they performed a sexual act they had previously declined. All the content was shared to a global market — including America — which led to these women being stalked and harassed in their local communities. With one upload, their lives were ruined.

THE LAW OF SUPPLY AND DEMAND

Basic economics teaches that as the demand for a product grows, the supply must grow with it. This is directly applicable to what the porn industry does by increasing demand for commercial sex. Because pornography desensitizes the human mind, the need for

new content is always exponentially increasing.

“Certain people, particularly those who consume a lot, are going to over time need to find novel content,” Thompson said. “This leads people to explore all kinds of fetishized and sometimes criminal content.”

To satisfy the demand for new content, the porn industry relies on predatory practices to lure victims. This never ending cycle leads to countless victims who are raped and filmed to supply the demand of pornography consumers. According to Thompson, studies show that the more pornography is consumed, the more likely the user is to become a sex buyer. This demand for more pornography feeds the demand for prostitution which, in turn, feeds the demand for sex trafficking.

“It creates this culture of exploitation and again where there’s a demand, for people whose main goal is to profit, they will create a supply,” Yoshihara said. “If the demand is for more pornography with underage girls, that is then going to necessitate that supply to be created.”

According to Keri Casey, Executive Director of Fight The New Drug, a non-religious organization that highlights the harmful effects of porn, pornography is often used as a normalizing tool to numb victims to the pain they will endure.

“Traffickers specifically will show a trafficking victim pornography to both train them for what’s about to happen and desensitize them to the violence that they will very likely experience,” Casey said. “Porn normalizes sexual abuse.”

HUMANITY’S DRUG

Not only does pornography normalize sexual abuse, it also corrupts any frequent user like a drug would. Fight the New Drug highlights that pornography is a multifaceted issue with negative impacts on the mind, brain and heart. According to data from Weebroot, roughly 40 million Americans regularly visit pornsites and 35% of all internet downloads are porn related. Fight the New Drug provides a research-based, three-prong teaching system about the harmful effects of pornography.

First, regular porn consumption has been linked to mental health issues such as depression, anxiety and social problems. A negative self body image and increased insecurities have a direct link to overactive porn consumption. Pornography also has the power to change sexual tastes leading to dissatisfaction in one’s own sex life. The endless demand for novelty necessitates the supply of content that is not realistic or healthy in a sexual relationship. Secondly, Casey explained that pornography also has a negative impact on the heart and personal relationships. Resources from Fight the New Drug show

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that porn is directly related to problems with arousal and sexual performance. Frequent consumers cannot be stimulated unless they conjure pornography in their mind, according to Thompson.

The last portion of the three-pronged approach explains that pornography has a broad global impact. Technology has changed not only the content of porn but the age of exposure as well. Whether it is by accident, through pop-up advertisements or willfully sought out, today's youths are more exposed to pornography than ever before.

TRAFFICKERS LOVE THE PANDEMIC

Due to the global pandemic, human trafficking has reached a new level of danger. In general, traffickers target people who are low on the socioeconomic totem pole. By creating circumstances that make it easier to be trafficked, such as economic instability and homelessness, the COVID-19 pandemic has escalated weaknesses that traffickers exploit.

The pandemic has also allowed the porn industry to prey upon people's vulnerabilities. During



the lockdown, Pornhub offered a free premium prescription to target those who are stressed or use pornography as a self-soothing mechanism. However, rather than actually helping users, Thompson warned that the content provided can actually lead to compulsive sexual behavior.

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“They were so predatory in taking advantage of people’s vulnerabilities during this time to get them sucked in even deeper,” Thompson said. “Obviously, not every pornography user is an abuser, but many of them are and because they are home, that means they have more access to children to abuse and therefore more content to upload.”

Many Christian organizations such as Exodus Cry have joined the anti-trafficking fight. Traffickinghub, a global anti-Pornhub campaign through Exodus Cry, prompted major companies to evaluate their relationship with the porn industry. Visa, Mastercard and Discover have prohibited the use of their cards on Pornhub and MindGeek which prompted the companies to ban uploads from unverified users.



JOIN THE FIGHT

Many small businesses have also taken a stand, including up and coming fashion designer Josh Holm. As a former student at Azusa Pacific University, Holm has advocated on the anti-human trafficking front for years and made his mark by founding Castles and Queens, a clothing brand with the goal of pointing people to ways they can be active in the community.

His first line “Lovers” follows the story of an American girl thrust into the world of human trafficking after being deceived by a “Romeo pimp.” Holm wanted to help spread awareness of the issue but understood that realistically, small businesses do not have a


wide-sweeping impact on societal issues. His goal is not to be a resource on trafficking but instead point to verified, non-profit organizations that are well-accomplished in making a difference.

“One of the best pieces of advice that I got was that we don’t need people to start more not-for-profits, [but] we need more wind behind the sails of the good ones that are already going,” Holm said.

Like Holm, any individual can support existing anti-trafficking efforts in the community. Established non-profits are voices for change that reach a broader audience than a smaller, self-started advocacy might. College students can join or establish clubs that raise awareness about trafficking

or push university curriculum to include human trafficking education. Social media platforms can help acknowledge the anti-trafficking fight by using hashtags such as #endtrafficking and #freedomfirst.

While it is not feasible to end trafficking from a social media post or a college club, one person can initiate a chain reaction of advocacy, hope, and inspire social change. Rose Kalemba used her voice to advocate change and helped create a global movement against the exploitation of minors in the porn industry. Now, the fight must involve all ethnicities, races, ages and religions in order to provide a framework for action that makes an impact.



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