Physically freeing: breaking taboos through online displays of the sexual self

Article (Accepted Version)

Veer, Ekant and Golf-Papez, Maja (2018) Physically freeing: breaking taboos through online displays of the sexual self. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 34 (13-14). pp. 1105-1125. ISSN 0267-257X

This version is available from Sussex Research Online: <http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/82177/>

This document is made available in accordance with publisher policies and may differ from the published version or from the version of record. If you wish to cite this item you are advised to consult the publisher's version. Please see the URL above for details on accessing the published version.

Copyright and reuse:

Sussex Research Online is a digital repository of the research output of the University.

Copyright and all moral rights to the version of the paper presented here belong to the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. To the extent reasonable and practicable, the material made available in SRO has been checked for eligibility before being made available.

Copies of full text items generally can be reproduced, displayed or performed and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

Physically Freeing: Breaking Taboos through Public Displays of the Sexual Self

Abstract:

This research specifically looks at the societal taboo of presenting an overtly sexualised self in a public forum. Specifically we investigate the way in which technology is being used to mediate sexual experiences between individuals and larger online communities. The research takes an exploratory look at why some users engage in Technology Mediated Sexual Encounters (TMSEs) and the impact that these online sexual encounters can have on one's sense of self, perceptions of freedom and expression. Beyond fantasy seeking, novel experiences, and instantcy of TMSEs, the importance of perceptions of power and dominance during a TMSE are discussed as well as the emancipatory feelings associated with being free to break taboo. The impact of engaging in TMSEs and their use in understanding sexuality and expectations of physical sexual experiences is also discussed. The implications from this research include a better understanding of how technology is being used to express one's self and how an over reliance on technology can influence one's offline relationships.

Physically Freeing: Breaking Taboos through Public Displays of the Sexual Self

The taboo of sex has been extensively studied (c.f. Kulick & Wilson, 2003), to the extent that one wonders if *sex* is even considered taboo. However, there still exist sexual practices and performances that many cultures still consider to be taboo. For example, Pereira, Teixeira, & Nobre (2017) present the taboo associated with sexual performativity amongst the disabled population in Portugal. Gurrieri, Brace-Govan, & Cherrier (2016) discuss the taboo associated with the overt presentation of sexually explicit material and violence in advertising. While Manivasakan & Sankaran (2016) discuss the taboo associated with sex education in India. Indeed, the specific sexual practice of incest features as one of the three ‘universal’ taboos identified by Freud (1950 [1912]). Sabri, Manceau, and Pras (2010, 62) eloquently state that taboos are “cultural productions that are embedded socially and historically”. In this way to understand the taboo associated with the presentation of the sexual self it should be done in a manner that is aligned with socio-cultural norms and historical foundations associated with the presentation of sex in the publics. Some cultures may be more liberal in their attitudes towards sex and sexual presentation whilst others still enforce the stigma and taboo of the body so heavily that restrictions are made with regards to the presentation of self so not to contaminate or pollute the ideals of the culture (Douglas, 1966).

This limiting nature of sex self-presentation, its place in consumer culture and its reach through the marketplace resonates with the notion that, for many, sex continues to be taboo (Roth, 2007), especially with regard to the overt representations of female sexual enjoyment (Walther, 2016). This notion is at odds with the growing pornification of many cultures, producing a normalised perception of sexual presentation (Dines, 2010), leading a tension between a media portrayal of the sexual self and glorification of sexual presentation and traditional notions of sexual privacy. This research argues that where a socially normative

taboo towards sexual self-presentation exists those that wish to break the norm seek marketplaces for sexual self-presentation. This is clearly shown in the way sexual expression is performed and consumed through raunch culture as a means of breaking taboos (Evans, Riley, & Shankar, 2010). We seek to further understand these expressions of sexual performativity in publics where the performer's identity may be withheld as a means of protecting themselves from a sexual stigmatisation in other marketplaces. Specifically, this research looks at the way in which sexually explicit material is created and distributed via digital technology and the how this taboo practice is becoming more public and more easily accessible by viewers. Furthermore, the research looks at the role that overt sexual displays by female participants not only act as a means of self-expression but as an act of defiance and activism against a socially constructed taboo against female sexual enjoyment.

There exists a growing number of people engaging with online and digital media as a means of sharing sexually explicit material of themselves and material they have received from others. In 2009 it was estimated that up to 11% of all US teens had sent sexually explicit photos to strangers online (Thomas, 2009). In the UK in 2016 over 10,000 people (2,000 of whom were teenagers themselves) were reported to police for distributing sexualised images of teenagers, an increase of 300% in three years (Osbourne, 2016). The sharing of self-created sexualised imagery has grown to an extent that online communities exist to support the curation and continued creation of 'amateur pornography' (Attwood, 2007; Van der Nagel, 2013). The expansion of what Ruberg (2015) calls a 'Digital Labour' leaves space for consumer researchers and social media analysts to understand why sexualised material is created, how it is distributed and what draws individuals seek out user generated sexual material online. In particular, how is the taboo sexual self able to be expressed in a digital format and why are these spaces being used for the expression of taboo practices.

This research looks at how technology is used to mediate sexual interactions between individuals and groups. This research primarily uses participants' accounts (Lyman & Scott, 1989) of sharing their sexual selves via technology to an intended audience. We also investigate a variety of online sexual interactions, such as online flirting, cyber-sex, sexting, and online amateur pornography sharing, and the reasons why individuals use technology to mediate sexual experiences. It is reasoned that Technology Mediated Sexual Encounters (TMSEs) are not only used as a means of easily accessing sexually explicit material, but also drawing a sense of perceived power and dominance over one's online audience. The use of TMSEs as a currency to gain control over other aspects of one's offline life is also discussed. Finally, how TMSEs are impacting offline sexual understanding and relationships is introduced. This manuscript outlines the extant literature on Sexual Expression online before outlining the method, findings, discussion and implications from the study. We conclude with limitations and a call for further research in the area of Technology Mediated Sexual Encounters.

Online Sexual interactions

Consumers' sexual selves are rarely discussed in consumer research, despite it being a fundamental basis of human existence. Schouten (1991) discussed the way in which consumers' sexual selves can impact their body image. Bust size, in particular, led some to feel self-conscious and stigmatized. This underlying detachment from idealised self, sexualised self and body image motivated some to consider plastic surgery to compensate for a perceived deficiency in their sexual self.

Online communication and community has been studied in depth in recent years. Consumers engage in varying levels of technology mediated interactivity and connection

(Boyd & Ellison, 2007), which can become sexual in nature. Online Sexual Activity (OSA) or Cybersex has been considered positive by some, as it can aid consumers in expressing fantasies that they may not be able to or want to experience in an offline environment (Mizuko, 1997). However, others argue that OSA opens younger users to an inaccurate experience of sex and can warp one's perception of sex and others as sexualized beings (Castro, Hartin, Kamnit, & Voron, 2011). There are also cases of even mild sexual contact online can damage offline relationships (Grov, Gillespie, Royce, & Lever, 2011). Despite these drawbacks, it is unlikely that OSA will diminish in frequency and explicitness (Cooper, Mansson, Daneback, Tikkanen, & Ross, 2003).

Professional pornographers have been utilizing the internet as a medium of exchange to increase the amount and quality of sexual material available to the public for many years. The Porn industry is reported to be worth over US\$97 billion worldwide in 2006, with nearly 30,000 US based users accessing pornographic material every second (Ropelato, 2013). Pornographic pictures are being complemented with high-resolution movies and text base cybersex chatrooms are being complemented with live streaming sex shows. Using websites created by the porn industry is often based on purposeful behaviour, such as sensation seeking and sexual arousal (Cook, 2007); however, what is not well understood is how consumers are using technology to mediate sexual relations with other non-professionals. That is, rather than the sex industry utilizing technology to expand its market and engage new users, how and why do everyday consumers share sexually explicit pictures, videos, exchanges, and experiences with both their spouses and strangers?

Online flirting or Cyber-Flirting is often the most common sexual engagement online and involves casual sexual chat between two online participants. Although the least sexual in nature (Whitty, 2004), Cyberflirting can still have an impact on offline relationships and notions of broken trust (Grov et al., 2011). Cyberflirting differs from more sexually explicit

chatting (such as Cybersex/Cybering) when participants actively describe sexual acts they wish to carry out with one another (Whitty & Carr, 2003). Other forms of TMSEs include the sharing of sexually explicit photographs and videos via email, websites, personal messaging services or text messages (Sexting); and engaging in live video sex shows via platforms such as ChatRoulette, Skype or Facetime. All of these exchanges are discussed in this research as ways in which sexual experiences are shared with others.

Stigma and Sexual Taboo: Demurity vs. Liberalism

Building on Goffman (1963) Link and Phelan (2001) conceptualise stigma as not only a means of differentiating one party from another but also the assignment of negative attributes to the stigmatised and their subsequent separation and loss of status. The manner in which a stigmatised self not only delimits a person from societal norms but also seeks to negatively impact the stigmatised leads many to separate the stigma from their identity. That is, if we know we carry a stigma we present aspects of ourselves that conceal the stigma and highlight other aspects of ourselves that bring us closer to those we wish to be associated with (Goffman, 1959, 1963). Tension arises when a stigmatised self also represents a self one wants to represent and champion. It is in this tension that practices are engaged in that allow the self can be revealed in specific contexts where it is not seen as stigmatised, as described by Goulding, Shankar, Elliott, & Canniford (2008) in their conceptualisation of contained illegality as a marketplace management of illicit pleasure. In the same way it is theorised here that where a stigmatised self exists and that self is one valued by the consumer a contained space or place will be accessed in an attempt to present the self to an in-group that bolsters their self rather than separates them (Crocker & Knight, 2005; Crocker & Major, 1989).

Taboo refers to a prohibition of a certain behaviour or conversation (Sabri, Manceau, & Pras 2010). With regards specifically to sexual taboos the bulk of the literature looks at sexual practices that are not considered part of the hegemonic heterosexual monogamous sexual relationship. Randall (1989) talks at length about the way in which sexual taboos exist outside of social heteronormativity and that these sexual taboos coincide with a 'divided' self. That is one is separated from a self that one craves as a result of moralistic values assigned by a wider society rather than one's own values. Randall's work presents pornography as one example of taboo eroticism that does not necessarily stigmatise 'sex' but rather the overt presentation of a sexual self. In this way the consumers of pornographic material can be subject to shame and guilt for accessing the material but moreover, the creators of pornographic content are stigmatised for their purposeful presentation of sex, even though the consumers are readily accessing the material. Similarly, Herek (2004, 2007) shows how sexual stigma and taboo impact homosexual men and practices are engaged in to ensure one's sexual identity is separated from situations where the taboo is most strongly felt.

However, the taboo of eroticised sexual presentation is not so simple in an evolving culture where pornography is becoming more readily accessed and normalised. Dines (2010) discusses the concept of a *pornified* culture as an embedded phenomenon that impacts many aspects of our lives. Her thesis is not one of anti-sex or sexuality but rather an aversion to a type of sexual presentation that is "debased, dehumanised, formulaic, and generic, a kind of sex based not on individual fantasy, play, or imagination, but one that is a result of an industrial product created by those who get excited not by bodily contact but by market penetration and profits." (6). She presents her own stigma against the porn industry not as an antithesis to sex but to the way in which sex is created, manipulated and presented to the public and how this impacts sex. In subsequent work she explores the role that a pornified culture impacts children's perceptions of sex and sexual practices whereby a celebration of

commodified and dehumanised sex does not prepare children for healthy sexual relationships (Dines, 2017). As such, we return to a system where sex that fits within the socially normative hegemony is often celebrated but beyond this, usually limited scope, it is stigmatised and taboo.

The tension between demurity, shame and liberation is evident in many cultures. Taves (1987) attributes much of the Western notions of sexual demurity to cultures where a Judeo-Christian founded moral hegemony exists. In the Indian subcontinent, Ciolfi (2011) identifies how presentation of female demurity in Hindi films is portrayed. She highlights the way in which the typical heroine is presented in a fashion that reinforces traditional views of chastity with sexual desire being often portrayed after motifs of marriage and family approval are presented. Butler (2008) presents the way in which sex is intertwined with politics in both highly religious and secular societies. That is, sexual morality may vary from person to person but a dominant cultural norm associated with demurity does impact generalised perceptions of appropriateness and taboo. Although some may not see sexual promiscuity as being a shameful trait, the stigma associated with promiscuity still exists, especially amongst young women. Reiss & Reiss's (1990) work focuses heavily on the freeing of sexuality and sexual dogma based on antiquated societal conventions, thereby allowing increased dialogue, responsibility and accountability about sexual relations. Indeed, some argue that technology does not add to one's sexual fantasies, but simply offers another forum for sexual expression and experimentation (Mizuko, 1997). Reiss & Reiss's (1990) call for a further sexual revolution in America is one of many voices that have promoted the notion increased of sexual freedom and emancipation from the doctrine that many do not agree with. However, in their call for pluralism they do not accept that many young people are also living in a pluralistic environment where a desire for sexual liberation is countervailed with an often dominant call for sexual demurity. As a result, TMSEs could be seen as a means for free

expression of one's sexualised self and sexual fantasies that one feels they cannot share in an offline forum (Veer, 2010; Wellman, Boase, & Chen, 2002; Wellman, Haase, Witte, & Hampton, 2001). The emancipatory nature of perceived anonymity online allows users to express themselves in a manner they feel they cannot in offline settings, which can mean that more extreme expressions of sexual behaviour are seen online that would not necessarily be readily seen or experienced offline (Cooper et al., 2003; Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006).

Sex and gender roles have been studied at length in consumer research (c.f. Fischer & Arnold, 1990; Neilson, 2010) and a considerable amount of literature has been published on the presentation of self online (e.g., Bullingham and Vasconcelos, 2013; Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006; Hogan 2010; Jensen Schau & Gilly, 2003; Toma, Hancock, & Ellison, 2008). However, very little is known about consumers' presentation of their sexual selves (Andersen & Cyranowski, 1994), especially in online spaces (Bolding, Davis, Hart, Sherr, & Elford, 2006). Buzwell & Rosenthal (1996) proposed a set of enduring and discrete sexual identities that are enacted by adolescents (e.g. naïve, adventurous, driven etc.); however, what this research shows that one can enact their sexuality offline in a substantively different manner from how they engage with sex in online spaces. Previous studies on female presentation of taboo have shown that the overt practices can be used as a presentation for social change and empowerment (Amos & Haglund, 2000). This research continues in this vein by looking at how the presentation of a sexualised self and use of technology as a mediator of this presentation may aid in the understanding of sexual taboos, emancipation and expression. As such, the following sections outline how the research into TMSEs was carried out and the findings drawn from the research.

Method

Qualitative enquiry was used to collect data on technology mediated sexual encounters. Data was collected via face to face and online text-based interviews (Skype or instant messenger text based interviews). Participants were recruited via a call for participation on popular chat forums and sites where amateur pornographers shared their work. Participants were told that the researcher is looking to understand sexual interactions online, regardless of how explicit or mild, and how these encounters compared to offline encounters. Participants were told that they would be interviewed by a male faculty member but were also able to be interviewed by a female post-graduate student, if they preferred. Keeping the participants safe whilst discussing a potentially taboo topic was central to the research process and participants were offered the option of being completely anonymous through instant messenger interviewing or via interviewing without using the video function. The data interviews were carried out over a period of three months and involved some snowball sampling where participants would recommend contacts who may also be willing to participate in the study. From the researchers' perspective the sensitivity of the topic also meant that the researchers involved with data collection were in regular contact with one another to debrief and discuss issues that may have affected them negatively during an interview.

A total of 36 interviews were conducted with participants (2 face to face; 5 via video interview; 29 via instant messaging service) Table 1 provides a summary of participants with gender, approximate ages, and relationship with TMSEs (either as a content creator or viewer and what types of TMSEs they engage with). Participants were based around the world, but all used English as their primary form of online communication. The mean age of participants was self-reported as 24 years old but was unable to be verified with those partaking in the instant messenger interviews. All participants agreed to be of adult age prior to engaging in the interviews. Four of the participants reported that they were married and a further twelve were in long-term relationships. Interviews were conducted with both viewers

of online sexual material and those who had created the online sexual material. The majority of participants who regularly viewed online sexual material were male and used chat forums, video forums (such as Chat Roulette) and social networking sites on a daily basis. Those enacting sexualised practices and presenting these acts online were predominantly female. Interviews lasted between 40-80 minutes and focused heavily on understanding how sexual encounters emerge in an online space; how they are enacted, and what impact that had on offline sexual encounters. Participants did not need to engage in TMSEs on a daily basis, but regular engagement with TMSEs was important to understand how avid users of TMSEs behaved and why they behaved in this manner.

Insert Table 1 about here

It should be noted that the specific sexual practices and the content created via TMSEs were not the focus of this research and the TMSEs themselves were not collected, studied or stored by the researcher to protect the identity of the participants. There were times where the participant may recall an online interaction or comment made by someone that observed their TMSE but we did not seek to validate these comments or analyse the material itself. The focus was on the accounts (Lyman and Scott, 1989) – statements made by either content creators to present and explain their sexualised self or recipients of online sexual material to explain their seeking out amateur pornography online. Future research could look to carry out a more in depth comparison of participants' accounts of their online sexual presentation and the actual material presented online, but that was not the case here.

All interviews were recorded (either audio recording or copying the text chat from an instant messenger interview) and provided to the participants for review, if so wished. A process-theorisation analysis based on participants' accounts of their online behaviour was undertaken to not just understand the phenomenon under investigation but also better understand the processes and practices undertaken by participants (Giesler & Thompson, 2016). In this way the analysis focused heavily on the ongoing phenomenological development of online sexual self-presentation rather than a static view of an instance where the sexual self was presented, which provided a richer perspective of the participants use and engagement with technology, self and others when engaging in TMSEs.

Face to face and video interviews were transcribed whilst text interviews were copied into separate documents for each participant. Data was analysed iteratively after each interview with notes taken immediately after an interview and key overarching themes memoed before full analysis was undertaken between participants. The coding method used followed closely that of Chamaz & Belgrave (2012) where the focus was on understanding themes that emerged from the data rather than seeking specific examples of preconceived themes. Coding of data began with description based coding of practices followed by more theorising of motivations of the practices described and emotions associated with the motivations for the practices. Emergent themes from individual transcripts and the dataset as a whole were created by the researchers as commonalities in practice, motivation and rationale were seen. Memoing was used throughout the process to track these emergent themes and seek theoretical linkages between practices and motivations.

The following section outlines the key themes from the research on technology mediated sexual encounters. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the anonymity of all participants.

Findings

A number of themes emerged from the coding exercise. The focus of this research is primarily on the ways in which the participants present their behaviour back to the researchers. Although material presented online was taken into account the participants' accounts of their behaviour was seen as a key driver for the analysis and their presentation of sexual self. That is, the unit of analysis is the accounts of participants' behaviour rather than the behaviour (ie, engagement with TMSEs) itself. The following sections outline the themes that were deemed to be the most theoretically and practically interesting and insightful for our understanding of technology mediated sexual encounters.

Power in Technology Mediated Sexual Encounters

Similar to Veer (2010) many of the respondents reported a desire to be either a voyeur or exhibitionist (or, in some instances, both) during sexual encounters online. What is different in the current study is that the rationale for being both a voyeur and exhibitionist has commonalities in the participants' desire for power; especially in a sense that one's sexuality had the ability to exert power over the other participant. For example, Katie (Female, 20, California, USA) recounts why she submits pornographic images of herself via Reddit.com's r/gonewild group:

Katie: It's a buzz, you know, having all these boys begging for more. I just need to show a little flesh and they're all drooling over me like, like dogs, huh! I **LOVE** to tease 'em and tell them what to do – like, ummm, I would say “tell me if you want more” and you get boys begging for more and more. It's so easy and you feel like you have this hoard of boys around you doing what you want

Conversely, Matt (Male, 24, Australia) feels his place as a voyeur and commenter on the r/gonewild group puts him in a position of authority and power:

Matt: It's seriously f**ked up, man. Think about it – some chick puts up a photo showing a little nip and all you have to do is go “oooh **MAN**, you're sooooo hot, please do this or that for me” and they do it. They're so lonely and depressed or craving attention that you give them a little nibble and next thing you know, they're showing you the whole f**king cake.

In both instances, both parties feel in a position of dominance and control where power is exerted over the other party in an attempt to attain their own needs. Katie, in this instance, is so enthralled with the attention she is receiving she feels able to control a group of observers, while Matt feels in a position of power as a little ‘playing’ on his part leads to an anonymous, but real girl exposing herself to him. Power, in this case, is in constant flux and negotiation. Rather than possessing power a priori, both the content creators and the viewers strive to attain it and enact behaviours in order to gain and maintain power. Importantly, the power has not resulted from coercion in that both Katie and Matt enact power through voluntarily sharing or commenting on the shared materials representing sexualised selves, respectively (Foucault, 1977, 1990)

In other instances, technology mediated sexual encounters can be used as means of foregoing domination and expressly offer power to the other party. Jane (Female, 22, New Zealand) shared how she had a boyfriend who would demand photos of her naked or partially clothed. Whenever she felt that the relationship was struggling, she would appease him with a photo.

Jane: He'd get angry, you know. Looking back I know I shouldn't have been in that relationship, but I was stupid and in a bad place. Whenever he'd get angry, I'd worry he'd leave me and I had to do something to keep him so I would promise to pxt [send a picture via her phone] him a photo of me – I don't...I'm not a slut – I was just afraid he'd be angrier and angrier and this was a way to make him happy with me.

Interviewer: Did anyone ever find out about the pictures?

Jane: Yeah, he showed some of his mates, ummm, I felt – yeah quite sick. Like it hurt sorta sick. I said I didn't like him doing that because they're for him and he's like, "but if they're for me, then I can do what I like with 'em"...I was too young, eh! I didn't know.

Jane felt she was able to maintain power in the relationship by keeping her boyfriend with her; however, to keep power, she was forced to absolve power and control over her sexual self and put it almost solely in the hands of her boyfriend. The subsequent sense of betrayal as her boyfriend shared the photos with his friends further solidifies the lack of power that Jane has in the relationship as a result of sharing her sexual self via technology. We are now in a position whereby Jane's power seeking practices, although initially providing a sense of perceived power through the resolvment of an argument, has led to a substantive loss of power and potential re-stigmatisation at the expense of the presentation of her sexual self. This reinforcement of stigma resonates strongly with experiences of when others present their stigmatised self openly to a new audience that do not share the same values as the person sharing the stigma (Goffman, 1963; Link, Struening, Rahav, Phelan, & Nuttbrock, 1997; Weiner, Perry, & Magnusson, 1988). This interaction and betrayal is also akin to Lerner's

(1991) proposition that some people in society purposefully absolve power unnecessarily under the pretence that it could maintain a sense of normality and structure in their own lives. The perceived power status that Jane initially sought has now been willingly absolved in an attempt to maintain relationship stability with her boyfriend, essentially giving all power over her sexual self to him.

Expressing sexual fantasies via technology

The anonymity associated with some technology mediated sexual encounters, such as cybersex in forums, allows participants to enact experiences that they admit they have not and, sometimes, would not enact in an offline situation. Craig (Male, 22, USA) shares how he experiments and engages in fantasy play through online sexual encounters:

Craig: You can do stuff and try stuff that you, you would be able to even approach a girlfriend about you. Errm, I...I guess it's like trying something out that perhaps interests you."

Interviewer: Do you think it's the same as trying it out in real life?

Craig: No, not physically – I mean, you can't touch the person, but you don't need to get the same feelings. You can experience it and see if you get off on it, mentally. If you do, then maybe you can try it...but, I also know that it's different online because there are people who are already into the stuff you want to try – you don't need to convince anyone or something.

Craig's use of TMSEs to engage in new experiences is essentially a sexualised expression of fantasy seeking (Belk & Costa, 1998; Martin, 2004; Mizuko, 1997); however, the experience is in a mediated environment and under the perception of anonymity, which has led some

users to engage in activities that go beyond what they would normally consider to be ordinary behaviour, as described by Robert (Male, 18, UK).

Robert You do kinda get carried away, though.

Interviewer: How do you mean?

Robert: Well, shit, you get so into it that you say and do shit that, ummm, you wouldn't normally. Say stuff because you're in the middle of this thing with this real person and they ask you to do something that's really too much but you're into it and it's easy so you do....like, one time, this girl I'd been chatting to for nearly 30 mins asked me to turn my camera on. She'd already turned her's on and so I knew she wasn't some weird dude having me on, so I did and...and I jacked off for her. Yeah, not something I'm exactly proud of thinking about it now, but at the time, when you're in the middle of it and there's a girl begging for it, you do it for them, and it felt *really* good. I wouldn't do that with a girlfriend though – I just got carried away and lost in the moment.

The immediacy and ease of a TMSE can mean that it is far easier to get 'carried away' in the encounter and behave in a manner that one would not ordinarily engage in without the sexual immediacy and ease of transmission that TMSE offers. This reflects Marie's (Female, 21, USA) experience of posting nude photos of herself online.

Marie: Ok, so there's no real easy way of saying it – I was drunk, I was bored and I was horny. Simple as that! If I weren't in the mood or had been thinking clearly, then I definitely wouldn't have done it,

but I'm glad I did – no regrets – you can't. I guess I'm glad my face wasn't in the photo, coz, sheeeet, that would have been bad, huh, if my dad found them or something. Just wrong!!...but when you're like sitting there with nothing to do and you have a camera, you just do it and forget about [taking the photo]...but it didn't happen like that - soon I was getting all sorts of messages from other horny people asking for more...asking for me! I didn't have someone with me, but having those people there was as good as having someone to screw – so hot!

The immediacy, anonymity, intimacy and sexual nature of TMSEs can be likened to offline 'hookup' behaviour, where caution is put to one side in exchange for a sexual experience (Paul, McManus, & Hayes, 2000). However, technology makes the encounters far more frequent and more adventurous with fetishes, fantasies and experiences more available to the everyday participant. As a result, there can be a disconnect between one's online and offline sexual experiences.

Disconnect with Offline Sexual experiences

Some participants shared how TMSE warped their sense of reality and their expectations of offline sexual encounters. Not only was there a sense that offline sexual encounters were far less accessible, but also the actual experience was very different to what active TMSE users were used to, as Richard (Male, 26, UK) explains:

Richard: My first actual time having sex was so bad. I mean, everyone's is bad, but I just burned because I had no idea what I was doing, even though I had had sex hundreds of times with women in chat rooms – yeah, ummm, so it was painful, which I never thought about. I

was doing shit that I would write about, because the girls I'd talk to online would say how hot it was, and my girlfriend was slapping my hand away and everything. I mean, I was all thumbs and I was falling apart...worse than that, I thought it took AGES for her to actually say we should have sex – online, I'd just log on and within an hour, someone wants me – it was like weeks with her. I constantly thought I was doing something wrong – I was definitely a better *Don Juan* when I was online, than when I was with a girl in real life.

Similarly, Katie's (Female, 20, California, USA) early sexual experience did not live up to her expectations, which were formed from TSMEs.

Katie: My first real time was the worst. Not just because it felt weird but it was awkward and clumsy and not at all erotic – I was having sex, not making love, so there was no connection, but I didn't even get close - *laughs* it was over that quick. I tried to think about what I'd written with boys online and stuff, just to make me feel sexy, but the first few times were just so *blah!*

The exaggerated nature of TMSEs made offline sexual encounters feel, for many, less exciting and less engaging. Not only was the act less erotic and romanticized (and often clumsy) but the fantasy was absent that some found appealing in TMSEs. Gerard (Male, 19, UK) shares about his experiences with pornography compared with sex with his girlfriend.

Gerard: Porn, for me, is easy, quick, exciting...ummm, it's better in many ways. You don't have the physical sensation but there are so many, ummm, many places that you can find out your...errr, your

place, I guess. You have so many options that you don't need to think too hard because it doesn't matter what sort of mood you're in, there's a video to fulfil your need. If I feel like *a[nal]*, then I can find it pretty quick and not have to worry about convincing my girlfriend in to it. I've tried it before, but it's not as sexy as on the vids, you know, it's just, well, weird. But in porn it's glorified, I guess and the chicks are in to it, so it's all good! It's great for me, and it's all over and done within a few minutes, and I'm back to my life. Hurts no-one...

Interviewer: How does your girlfriend feel about it?

Gerard: Doesn't come up – I mean, I keep it from her because I don't need her knowing because it'll just cause issues, yeah. Why even bother having that discussion? It's me time and doesn't concern her.

Gerard uses TMSEs to draw closer to a sexualised fantasy that he doesn't feel is possible or even necessary in an offline setting. This engagement with TMSEs has also led him to disassociate his sexual self from his girlfriend. At the time of the interview, Gerard sees no harm in keeping his TMSEs from his girlfriend, even though he knows she will likely disapprove.

Emancipation Through Sharing

Finally, one aspect where participants showed a specific attraction to TMSEs was the ability to share a societal taboo in a manner that could not be re-allocated back to their offline identity. That is, their online behaviour, even though it embodied a societal taboo, was a

complete disconnect from the expectations their offline world had for them. A'ishah, in particular, provided a context where taboos associated with sexual demurity and self-presentation of her sexualised self were evident. A'ishah is well known on social media forums for presenting nude still photos of herself wearing nothing other than a hijab and providing social commentary with each picture stating her dissent against the Islamic demurity expectations placed upon her in her home country. There is no evidence to suggest that A'ishah lives in an oppressive Islamic state or that it is forbidden to present such sexual presentation; however, the following she is able to attract as a result of her presentation shows the appeal her chosen form of sexual presentation yields. In a text interview with her A'ishah explains her rationale for engaging in online TMSEs whilst wearing a hijab.

A'ishah: It's the freedom to say f**k you to the establishment. I think it's my way of saying "I'm ME" and I don't need anyone to tell me what morals they think are important for ME. It's my body, my life and my choice so it's my way of taking the control back that the government think is theirs. For all the rules they have, they can't control my body, especially when the internet can't be stopped.

Interviewer: Are you ever worried about being found out? Worried if someone recognises you?

A'ishah: I have to be careful. It's not like I might be told off or grounded if I'm found. I could be killed. This is my activism. If I was naked in the streets I'd be dead and no one would hear about me. If im naked on my sheets I'll live forever even if I die.

Interviewer: It's a noble cause. But surely you enjoy this, too? Is there something about the pictures that you like beyond the chance to counter establishment?

A'ishah: Of course! LOL! I wouldn't do this unless it excited me, too. I've always loved being naked and free and sexual but now it's sexual and free and meaningful. I combine my love for me and the cause. I hope other girls realise they don't have to change who they are just because some penis says what's right and wrong for them. I'm me, they're them, you're you. That's the most important thing for me.

The rationale presented by A'ishah is that constrictive socially enacted taboo structures in her homeland can be broken with an active defiance, even at the risk of her own physical safety. Her motivation is still founded in sexual presentation and still to share her sexual self with others, but the politicisation of her body and actions speaks to the nuanced nature that the taboo plays in her home country. In this specific case the presentation is intertwined with how well understood the consequences associated with the taboo of sharing a sexualised sense of self is, in contrast to Jane who was unaware of her actions potentially causing harm back to her in the future. However, it's not just the presentation of sexualised self that is an emancipatory feeling for A'ishah, it is also seen as a liberating experience for those viewing the material, as described by Derek.

Derek: I really like A'ishah's posts. I don't have a Muslim fetish or even have met a Muslim but I like to see...ummm, stuff that's not allowed. That stuff that maybe is a bit risqué. Her pictures aren't the most explicit but that f**king head scarf is just so hot. It makes it really naughty and I like that a lot.

Interviewer: Do you think you'll look at Muslim women differently after seeing A'ishah's pics?

Derek: I guess I'll just hope a Muslim girl would be as hot as that if I was with her, but I doubt it...It's a pic and it's hot, that's all I'm thinking. Nice pic to nut off to.

Derek's fascination with the taboo nature of A'ishah's posts is not unexpected but the dehumanisation and objectification of her and her imagery does not necessarily align with A'ishah's moralistic stance. This disconnect between the activism stance that A'ishah is trying to present has simply reverted to sexualised object lust, which could be argued is the exact reason why some conservative regimes implement sexual demurity rules for women in the first place. The State enacting an implementation of power and control over the women by forbidding sexualised practices leads to a woman breaking such practices as an act of defiance over the enforced control; however, the subsequent viewers revert to seeing the woman as an object to control for personal use and gratification. The following section expands up on these themes to discuss their implications for consumer culture and extant theory on sexual experiences.

Discussion & Implications

This research looked at how the taboo of sexualised self is represented online through Technology Mediated Sexual Encounters. The research focused on the ways in which a tension between what is socially seen as appropriate behaviour was circumvented via technology use and the impact that this representation of a taboo practice online aided in the feeling of power and control by those breaking the taboo. However, the online expression of

sexualised self, although empowering for some, also yielded a sense of disconnect between online and offline sexual experiences. Another common theme expressed in the research is the speed and instancy at which TMSEs can be engaged in and the lack of thought, effort and knowledge needed in order to present a sexual encounter. This speed and ease of expression via technology has meant that some participants were known to make unconscious decisions in their expression of their sexualised self, as in the case of Marie who posted nude photos of herself whilst drunk or Jane who would send provocative photos of herself to appease her boyfriend. TMSEs offered these women an opportunity to express their sexual self in a means that is quick and instant and, often times, yielded instant responses from recipients. This mediated nature of technology seems to have given some participants a false sense of trust and security that is not necessarily true (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Wellman et al., 2002; Wellman et al., 2001). That is, despite appearing to be between two consenting adults, the creation of a sexualised image means that a physical record is available for someone else to view.

The exchange of power over one's sexual self through sharing an image or sexualised content is also a regularly occurring theme. Again, Jane felt that she was able to maintain control over her relationship as a result of sharing her sexual self via a TMSE; in reality, she absolved power over her sexual self and, due to the permanency of the images shared, was held to ransom by the images that empowered her to begin with (Lerner, 1991). Similarly, A'ishah's presentation of her sexualised self as an act of defiance and activism against conservative Muslim expressions of female sexualised was never experienced by some male viewers and, in fact, her sexualised expressions became another tool of control as viewers simply used her imagery as a means to sexual self-gratification.

This transition of power and use of power as a currency by everyday people in their everyday lives is similar to Foucault's (1980) notion that power is not something retained by

an organised structure, but wielded in multiple forms by multiple actors. In Jane's case, her fear of being single and the chaos that singledom would entail was far less appealing than being used as a sexual object. A'ishah's sense of empowerment for breaking taboo ideals of women was transferred as a means of freeing herself from a lack of power and control in her offline, everyday life under the control of a conservative State. Although, many empowered and confident people may argue this is a terrible choice, we see expression of such behaviour in aspects of many people's lives, albeit in milder forms; for example, wearing clothes and grooming to appear more sexually attractive to a partner/audience rather than for oneself.

Power discourses online are also challenged in the current literature. Previous studies have shown that online sexual interactions see men as being a dominant, more powerful figure (Sussman & Tyson, 2000); however, the current study shows that women are able to retain a sense of power, even though they may appear submissive. In the TMSEs studied here, the female participants report a sense of dominance and power over the male populace they engage with as they see the men braying for their sexuality. The female respondents do not find this sense of power degrading, but emancipating, as they are able to express their sexuality and draw a huge amount of attention for it. Equally, the men feel in power, even though they play a role of beggar during the TMSEs. Both actors play their part and both feel empowered as a result from the TMSE. This calls into question the power of power when both parties feel dominant and in control. It could be argued that notions of power and control have manifested into a more malleable form online in a way that without direct conflict or tests of dominance both parties can feel dominant at the expense of the subjectified. Whether it is the female participants who subjectify the male audience or the male audience who objectify and subjectify the female content creators. The dual enactment of power on the part of both of the actors suggests that the power can 'empower' – it can be a positive force and not necessarily something coercive or otherwise negative (Foucault, 1977).

The expression of sexual self via TMSEs was regularly regarded as being a key draw for respondents. The ability to experience fantasies and scenarios that were unlikely to occur in real life meant that experimentation, sexual satisfaction, and the desire for taboo were all possible. In other words, TMSEs lived up to the liberating potential of online self-representations (Belk, 2014). Respondents regularly expressed the draw of TMSEs being linked to sexual escapism and finding other willing participants in the encounter without the need to convince a physical partner to experiment with them. The taboo TMSE offers participants the ability to engage in an experience with little or no effort, other than having effective online search skills. This aspect of *fantasy seeking* goes beyond the well understood concept of sensation seeking (Zuckerman, 1979) to behaviour that outwardly looks for the imaginary and the fantastical (Martin, 2004), but in an online settings that one may not ever wish to experience in an offline setting. The current understanding of fantasy seeking is limited with much of the literature focused on how people relate to fantastical characters (Davis, 1980) and with other authors even linking it to anti-social psychopathy (Williams & Paulhus, 2004). It is argued here that seeking fantasy, in whatever form, need not be restricted to an antisocial few, but be seen as a larger part of the online experience, whether it be for sexual experimentation, online tourism, or gaming (Gilsdorf, 2009; Wang, Zhao, & Bamossy, 2008). It is accepted that the current study does present a potentially extreme set of examples associated with sexual self-presentation online. The participants may be the most overt and public in their displays of sexual self but it is through these participants we seek to understand practices and behaviour from those who may not feel as comfortable sharing their online sexual experiences. That is, the taboo associated with the public presentation of sexual self is so strong that we may never hear about them. One indication of this taboo in effect is from the lack of responses from our call for participants, where a forum frequented by hundreds of thousands of people every day only yielded a small number of actively engaged

participants and many of those that did participate expressed a strong desire to remain completely anonymous.

One aspect that makes TMSE so prevalent has been its speed of delivery, perceived anonymity and lack of understanding about the future impacts associated with a quick encounter. Carrying out a TMSE has become so easy and, in some cases, mindless, that participants in these encounters often forget that their actions are often recorded and can possibly be kept as an indefinite record. For example, Marie admits that her amateur pornography behaviour could be used against her, if found by members of her family. Equally, sharing photos between private phones is not always as private as some of the respondents believe, as each photo needs to pass through a service provider and the final picture can be kept indefinitely or shared with very little effort. Technology not only speeds up communication but it also allows for communication to pass with little or no forethought, which leads to negative consequences (Valkenburg & Peter, 2007). The same is occurring with sexually explicit liaisons where little or no forethought is being given to the enduring consequences of a TMSE. With the permanency of online activity there is a risk that a ‘mistake’ can have ongoing implications for participants in TMSE. In a similar way, the instantaneity of TMSEs can lead to a degradation of offline relationships, which can often require greater and more ongoing effort. Gerard’s use of porn to find instant sexual gratification led to a sense of distance between him and his girlfriend as he began to hide his porn use from his girlfriend. This growing separation from one’s online world and their offline world is consistent with other studies in online secret communities (Veer, 2010, 2012).

With regards to contribution to marketing practice and theory this research shows that consumers’ desire to find avenues and marketplaces for self-presentation is mediated through a system that allows differing selves to be kept separate. The research shows that the role of digital technology and social media channels in enabling self-presentation of a stigmatised

self but also as a means of bolstering self-esteem by allowing self-presentation in a perceived safer environment. In reality, it could be argued that the use of these technologies does not offer real power and validation to the performers as the platforms are not as safe as they initially hoped. Content is saved, shared and creators are subjectified in a manner that may re-stigmatise sexual performance and/or victimise the performers. This gives us a strong rationale for creating more effective social marketing programs that aid vulnerable consumers in understanding the dangers of sexual performance online. There also exist implications for brands and hosts that enable sexual self-presentation on their platforms. Even though the Internet is seen by some users as a space for complete freedom of speech and expression there exists a need for guides and supporters for newly arrive ‘explorers’ of this freeing technology (Balkin, 2004). Marketers and brands can play a role in creating these guides and guidelines to support healthy and safe practices for the vulnerable, as reddit did in 2012 by removing parts of its site that encouraged the sharing of sexual material created by minors (Chen, 2012). This is not to say that reddit’s policies are infallible but a stronger stance against illegal and exploitative practices through both action and policy implementation is encouraged. Equally, brands should be wary of implementing totalitarian online control but perhaps a movement towards Jones’s (2000) notion of Digital Rule or a method of monitoring and, where necessary, enacting restrictions, removal of access and facilitating social regulatory responses that are specific to spaces and places online. Similarly, brands should be wary of purposefully engaging in practices that may incite or encourage trolling behaviour by creating an environment where trolls, targets and the absence of effective regulators can coalesce (Golf-Papez & Veer, 2017).

Finally, the way in which TMSEs can misinform offline sexual encounters is of importance for understanding the future of offline social interactions. This research has shown that the ease of access and glorified nature of sex via TMSEs can affect perceptions of

sexual intercourse, in line with Dines's (2017) concerns regarding the normalisation of porn and its impact upon children's sexual development. The stylised nature of pornography and the fantastical nature of Cybersex both contribute to an unrealistic impression of physical sexual encounters. However, the ease of accessing TMSEs and the diversity of experiences available to users may make the effort associated with finding a similar experience offline all too difficult. One can argue that the physical closeness of a sexual relationship is not replicated in a TMSE, but many users reported a sexual release and, sometimes, an emotional closeness through TMSEs that compensated for a lack of physicality. When some users feel unable to engage in physical sexual relationships their reliance on TMSEs can create an ongoing cycle of misinformation, misrepresentation and false expectations. More concerning; however, is that this research essentially shows that many of the creators of sexualised content that is presented in the public are not only the subjects of the sexual self-presentation but the subjectified sexualised objects (Evans et al., 2010; Gill, 2003). As such we are faced with a space where many of the female creators of sexualised content perceive their sexual self-presentational practices give them agency, dominance and power over the audience but in reality the presentation of sexual self in a public forum, especially as much of the material can be stored and retained by the audience, can be used against the creator.

Limitations and future research

This research has taken a reasonably small sample set and focused on avid users of TMSEs. Future research should engage a wider range of users to look to understand how TMSEs impact people of different ages (especially younger consumers) and of different experience levels (will someone in a committed sexual relationship engage in TMSE differently from someone who is not sexually active). Means and practices to protect younger users of

technology and those who are likely to be exploited through online predation and/or simply not understanding the nature of online sexual relationships should be developed and implemented into sex education. Ongoing research to understand the long-term impact of TMSEs on sexual knowledge and experience would also be one area to investigate to ascertain the role that TMSEs play as a formative source of knowledge in consumers' understanding of sex. Finally, even though some women were interviewed as part of this research, drawing on a wider sample of women who engage in TMSEs would also be useful to determine how prevalent sexual encounters are for women online, as well as men. That is, the focus has been primarily on the female content creators for a male audience, rather than look at women as viewers and engagers with pornography online. A deeper examination of feminist theory and online pornography would also provide a greater level of insight into the role of women as objects of desire but also as women as powerful controllers of their sexualised identity and body.

References:

- Amos, A., & Haglund, M. (2000). From social taboo to "torch of freedom": the marketing of cigarettes to women *Tobacco Control*, 9(1), 3-8. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/tc.9.1.3>
- Andersen, B. L., & Cyranowski, J. M. (1994). Women's Sexual Self-Schema. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 67(6), 1079-1100.
- Attwood, F. (2007). No Money Shot? Commerce, Pornography and New Sex Taste Cultures. *Sexualities*, 10(4), 441-456. doi: 10.1177/1363460707080982
- Belk, R. W., & Costa, J. A. (1998). The Mountain Man Myth: A Contemporary Consuming Fantasy. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 25(December), 218-240.
- Bolding, G., Davis, M., Hart, G., Sherr, L., & Elford, J. (2006). Heterosexual men and women who seek sex through the Internet. *International journal of STD & AIDS*, 17(8), 530-534.
- Boyd, D. M., & Ellison, N. B. (2007). Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 13(1), Article 11.
- Buzwell, S., & Rosenthal, D. (1996). Constructing a Sexual Self: Adolescents' Sexual Self-Perceptions and Sexual Risk-Taking. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 6(4), 489-513.
- Castro, A., Hartin, M., Kamnit, G., & Voron, M. (2011). Adolescents, the Internet, and Sexuality. In J. D. Atwood & C. Gallo (Eds.), *The Effects of the Internet on Social Relationships: Therapeutic Considerations*. Bloomington: iUniverse, Inc.
- Cook, I. (2007). Western Heterosexual Masculinity, Anxiety, and Web Porn. *The Journal of Men's Studies*, 14(1), 47-63.
- Cooper, A., Mansson, S.-A., Daneback, K., Tikkanen, R., & Ross, M. W. (2003). Predicting the future of Internet sex: Online sexual activities in Sweden. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*, 18(3), 277-291.
- Davis, M. H. (1980). A Multidimensional Approach to Individual Differences in Empathy. *JSAS Catalog of Selected Documents in Psychology*, 10, 85-104.
- Ellison, N. B., Heino, R., & Gibbs, J. (2006). Managing Impressions Online: Self-Presentation Processes in the Online Dating Environment. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 11(2), 415-441.
- Fischer, E., & Arnold, S. J. (1990). More than a Labor of Love: Gender Roles and Christmas Gift Shopping. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 17(December), 333-345.

- Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972--1977*. New York, N.Y.: Pantheon Books.
- Giesler, M., & Thompson, C. J. (2016). A Tutorial in Consumer Research: Process Theorization in Cultural Consumer Research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 43(4), 497-508. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucw047>
- Gilsdorf, E. (2009). *Fantasy Freaks and Gaming Geeks*. Guilford, CT Lyons Press.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Oxford: Doubleday.
- Grov, C., Gillespie, B. J., Royce, T., & Lever, J. (2011). Perceived Consequences of Casual Online Sexual Activities on Heterosexual Relationships: A U.S. Online Survey. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 40(2), 429-439.
- Gurrieri, L., Brace-Govan, J., & Cherrier, H. (2016). Controversial advertising: transgressing the taboo of gender-based violence. *European Journal of Marketing*, 50(7/8), 1448-1469. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-09-2014-0597>
- Kulick, D., & Wilson, M. (2003). *Taboo: Sex, identity and erotic subjectivity in anthropological fieldwork*. London: Routledge.
- Lerner, M. (1991). *Surplus powerlessness: The psychodynamics of everyday life and the psychology of individual and social transformation*. Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press International.
- Manivasakan, J., & Sankaran, S. (2016). Sexual health education-is it still a taboo? A survey from an urban school in Puducherry. *International Journal of Reproduction, Contraception, Obstetrics and Gynecology*, 3(1), 158-161.
- Martin, B. A. S. (2004). Using the imagination : consumer evoking and thematizing of the fantastic imaginary. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31(1), 136-149.
- Mizuko, I. (1997). Virtually Embodied: The Reality of Fantasy in a Multi-User Dungeon. In D. Porter (Ed.), *Internet Culture* (pp. 95-96): Routledge.
- Neilson, L. A. (2010). Boycott or buycott? Understanding political consumerism. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 9(3), 214-227.
- Osbourne, S. (2016). *Sexting concerns raised after more than 2,000 children reported to police*. Retrieved from <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/sexting-nude-selfies-children-statistics-police-child-protection-nspcc-a7219501.html>
- Paul, E. L., McManus, B., & Hayes, A. (2000). "Hookups": Characteristics and correlates of college students' spontaneous and anonymous sexual experiences. *Journal of Sex Research*, 37(1), 76-88.

- Pereira, R., Teixeira, P. M., & Nobre, P. J. (2017). Still a Taboo: Perspectives of Portuguese People With Physical Disabilities About Their Sexual Health. *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*, 14(5), e314.
- Reiss, I. L., & Reiss, H. M. (1990). *An end to shame: Shaping our next sexual revolution*. Buggalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books.
- Ropelato, J. (2013). *Internet Pornography Statistics*. Retrieved from <http://internet-filter-review.toptenreviews.com/internet-pornography-statistics.html>
- Roth, A. E. (2007). Repugnance as a Constraint on Markets. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 21(3), 37-58. doi: 10.1257/jep.21.3.37
- Ruberg, B. (2015). Doing it for free: digital labour and the fantasy of amateur online pornography. *Porn Studies*, 3(2), 147-159. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/23268743.2016.1184477>
- Schouten, J. W. (1991). Selves in Transition: Symbolic Consumption in Personal Rites of Passage and Identity Reconstruction. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 17(March), 412-424.
- Sussman, N. M., & Tyson, D. H. (2000). Sex and power: gender differences in computer-mediated interactions. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 16(4), 381-394.
- Taves, A. (1987). Spiritual Purity and Sexual Shame: Religious Themes in the Writings of Harriet Jacobs. *Church History*, 56(1), 59-72.
- Thomas, K. (2009). *Teen Online and Wireless Safety Survey* Retrieved from <http://www.cox.com/wcm/en/aboutus/datasheet/takecharge/2009-teen-survey.pdf>
- Valkenburg, P. M., & Peter, J. (2007). Preadolescents' and adolescents' online communication and their closeness to friends. *Developmental Psychology*, 43(2), 267-277.
- Van der Nagel, E. (2013). Faceless bodies: Negotiating technological and cultural codes on Reddit Gonewild. *Journal of Media Arts Culture* 10(2), 1-10.
- Veer, E. (2010). Hiding in Plain Sight: 'Secret' Anorexia Nervosa Communities on Youtube. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 38, Available Online: <http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/display.asp?id=15846>.
- Veer, E. (2012). Virtually 'Secret' Lives in 'Hidden' Communities. In R. W. Belk & R. Llamas (Eds.), *The Digital Consumer* (pp. In Press). Abingdon: Routledge.

- Walther, L. (2016). Next stop, Pleasure Town: Identity transformation and women's erotic consumption. *Journal of Business Research*, 69(1), 273-283. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2015.07.040>
- Wang, J., Zhao, X., & Bamossy, G. J. (2008). Avatar and Extended Self in Online Gaming. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 35, 940.
- Wellman, B., Boase, J., & Chen, W. (2002). The Networked Nature of Community: Online and Offline. *IT & Society*, 1(1), 151-165.
- Wellman, B., Haase, A. Q., Witte, J., & Hampton, K. (2001). Does the Internet Increase, Decrease, or Supplement Social Capital? *American Behavioral Scientist*, 45(3), 436-455.
- Whitty, M. T. (2004). Cyber-flirting: An examination of men's and women's flirting behaviour both offline and on the Internet. *Behaviour Change*, 21(2), 115-126.
- Williams, K. M., & Paulhus, D. L. (2004). Factor structure of the Self-Report Psychopathy scale (SRP-II) in non-forensic samples. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 37(4), 765-778.
- Zuckerman, M. (1979). *Sensation seeking: Beyond the optimal level of arousal*. Hillsdale, N.J.: L. Erlbaum Associates
-
- Balkin, J. M. (2004). Digital Speech and Democratic Culture: A Theory of Freedom of Expression for the Information Society. *New York University Law Review*, 79(1), 1-58.
- Butler, J. (2008). Sexual politics, torture, and secular time. *British Journal of Sociology*, 59(1), 1-23. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-4446.2007.00176.x
- Chamaz, K., & Belgrave, L. L. (2012). Qualitative interviewing and grounded theory analysis. In J. F. Gubrium, J. A. Holstein, A. B. Marvasti & K. D. McKinney (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Interview Research: The Complexity of the Craft* (pp. 347-366). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Inc.
- Chen, A. (2012). *Unmasking Reddit's Violentacrez, The Biggest Troll on the Web*. Retrieved from <https://web.archive.org/web/20121012213707/http://gawker.com/5950981/unmasking-reddits-violentacrez-the-biggest-troll-on-the-web>
- Ciolfi, S. (2011). Demure Heroines Expressing Sexual Desire. Hints of traditional motifs in popular Hindi cinema. *Acta Orientalia Vilnensia* 12(2), 91-100.
- Crocker, J., & Knight, K. M. (2005). Contingencies of Self-Worth. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 14(4), 200-203.
- Crocker, J., & Major, B. (1989). Social Stigma and Self-Esteem: The Self-Protective Properties of Stigma. *Psychological Review*, 96(4), 608-630. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.96.4.608>
- Dines, G. (2010). *Pornland: How Porn has Hijacked our Sexuality*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

- Dines, G. (2017). Growing Up With Porn: The Developmental and Societal Impact of Pornography on Children. *Dignity: A Journal on Sexual Exploitation and Violence*, 2(3). doi: 10.23860/dignity.2017.02.03.03
- Douglas, M. (1966). *Purity & Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Evans, A., Riley, S., & Shankar, A. (2010). Technologies of Sexiness: Theorizing Women's Engagement in the Sexualization of Culture. *Feminism & Psychology*, 20(1), 114-131. doi: 10.1177/0959353509351854
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books.
- Foucault, M. (1990). *The history of sexuality: An introduction* (Vol. 1). New York, NY: Vintage.
- Freud, S. (1950 [1912]). *Totem and Taboo* (J. Strachey, Trans.). London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd.
- Gill, R. (2003). From Sexual Objectification to Sexual Subjectification: The Resexualisation of Women's Bodies in the Media. *Feminist Media Studies*, 3(1), 99-106.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Oxford: Doubleday.
- Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Golf-Papez, M., & Veer, E. (2017). Don't feed the trolling: rethinking how online trolling is being defined and combated. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 33(15-16), 1336-1354. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2017.1383298>
- Goulding, C., Shankar, A., Elliott, R., & Canniford, R. (2008). The Marketplace Management of Illicit Pleasure. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 35(5), 759-771. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1086/592946>
- Herek, G. M. (2004). Beyond "Homophobia": Thinking About Sexual Prejudice and Stigma in the Twenty-First Century. *Sexuality Research & Social Policy*, 1(2), 6-24.
- Herek, G. M. (2007). Confronting Sexual Stigma and Prejudice: Theory and Practice. *Journal of Social Issues*, 63(4), 905-925. doi: 10.1111/j.1540-4560.2007.00544.x
- Jones, R. (2000). Digital Rule: Punishment, Control and Technology. *Punishment and Society*, 2(1), 5-22. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F14624740022227836>
- Link, B. G., & Phelan, J. C. (2001). Conceptualizing Stigma. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 27, 363-385.
- Link, B. G., Struening, E. L., Rahav, M., Phelan, J. C., & Nuttbrock, L. (1997). On Stigma and Its Consequences: Evidence from a Longitudinal Study of Men with Dual Diagnoses of Mental Illness and Substance Abuse. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 38(2), 177-190.
- Lyman, S. M., & Scott, M. B. (1989). *A Sociology of the Absurd* (2nd ed.). Dix Hills, NY: General Hall, Inc.
- Randall, R. S. (1989). *Freedom and Taboo: Pornography and the Politics of a Self Divided*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press.
- Sabri, O., Manceau, D., & Pras, B. (2010). Taboo: An Underexplored Concept in Marketing. *Recherche et Applications en Marketing*, 25(1), 59-85. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/205157071002500103>
- Weiner, B., Perry, R. P., & Magnusson, J. (1988). An Attributional Analysis of Reactions to Stigmas. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 55(5), 738-748.
- Whitty, M. T., & Carr, A. N. (2003). Cyberspace as Potential Space: Considering the Web as a Playground to Cyber-Flirt. *Human Relations*, 56(7), 869 - 891. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F00187267030567005>

Table 1: Participant list with types of TMSEs they choose to engage in

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Data Collection Method	Engagement with TMSEs
Aaron	27	Male	Instant Messenger	Regular viewer of user generated sexual material online (weekly, single)
Abby	23	Female	Instant Messenger	ChatRoulette fan specifically looking for sexual material
A'isha	Not disclosed	Female	Video Interview	Poster of self-created sexually explicit material on public forums, mainly images
Ali	19	Female	Instant Messenger	Poster of self-created sexually explicit material on public forums, live chat/videos
Angus	28	Male	Instant Messenger	Regular cybersex participant
Annie	22	Female	Instant Messenger	Regular cybersex participant
Ashley	30	Fluid	Instant Messenger	Regular viewer of user generated sexual material online (Daily, single)
Becca	19	Female	Instant Messenger	Poster of self-created sexually explicit material on public forums, mainly gifs and videos
Cleo	20	Female	Instant Messenger	Poster of self-created sexually explicit material on public forums, mainly images
Craig	22	Male	Instant Messenger	Regular viewer of user generated sexual material online (Multiple times a day, long-term relationship)
Derek	23	Male	Instant Messenger	Regular viewer of user generated sexual material online (Daily, single)
David	24	Male	Video Interview	Regular cybersex participant/Encourages his girlfriends to send him sexts
Francis	26	Fluid	Instant Messenger	Regular viewer of user generated sexual material online (Daily, single)
Frank	28	Male	Instant Messenger	Regular viewer of user generated sexual material online (Daily, single)
Gerard	19	Male	Instant Messenger	Regular cybersex participant
James	30	Male	Instant Messenger	Regular viewer of user generated sexual material online (Daily, married)
Jane	22	Female	Face to Face Interview	Sexter/Uses her phone to send sexual material to partner
Judy	Not disclosed	Female	Instant Messenger	Poster of self-created sexually explicit material on public forums, mainly images
Katie	20	Female	Instant Messenger	Poster of self-created sexually explicit material on public forums, live chat/videos
Maggie	22	Female	Instant Messenger	Poster of self-created sexually explicit material on public forums, mainly images
Mandy	22	Female	Instant Messenger	Poster of self-created sexually explicit material on public forums, mainly images
Marie	21	Female	Video Interview	Poster of self-created sexually explicit material on public forums, mainly images
Mark	22	Male	Face to Face Interview	Regular viewer of user generated sexual material online (Daily, single)
Matt	24	Male	Instant Messenger	Regular viewer of user generated sexual material online (Daily, single)
Maxine	22	Female	Instant Messenger	Poster of self-created sexually explicit material on public forums, live chat/videos
Michael	32	Male	Instant Messenger	Regular viewer of user generated sexual material online (Daily, single)
Mike	35	Male	Instant Messenger	Regular cybersex participant
Nick	32	Male	Instant Messenger	Regular viewer of user generated sexual material online (Daily, single)

Richard	22	Male	Video Interview	Regular viewer of user generated sexual material online (Daily, long-term relationship)
Rob	29	Male	Instant Messenger	Regular viewer of user generated sexual material online (Multiple times a day)
Robert	18	Male	Video Interview	Regular cybersex participant
Sal	20	Female	Instant Messenger	Poster of self-created sexually explicit material on public forums, live images/'camgirl'
Sam	28	Fluid	Instant Messenger	Poster of self-created sexually explicit material on public forums, mainly images
Samir	25	Male	Instant Messenger	ChatRoulette fan specifically looking for sexual material
Shelly	22	Female	Instant Messenger	Sexter/Uses her phone to send sexual material to partner
Stephen	24	Male	Instant Messenger	ChatRoulette fan specifically looking for sexual material