

February 2, 2021

## SUBMISSION TO HOUSE OF COMMONS ETHICS COMMITTEE

Re: Mindgeek study

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Dear Committee Members

Thank you for this opportunity to share with you my concerns regarding Mindgeek on behalf of C-CAVE, an organization I have led since 1986. Over the years I have tracked and at times participated in the public discussion on pornography in Canada. My attention to the issue is based on my experiences as a mother and a feminist, with a background in psychiatric nursing, a general arts degree, a masters in psychology and a doctorate in adult education. My first book, *MIND ABUSE Media Violence In An Information Age*, published in 2000 is based on research undertaken for my doctorate, completed at OISEUT in 1995. My second, published this month, is an update titled *MIND ABUSE Media Violence And Its Threat to Democracy*. In both I discuss numerous trends and studies involving pornography, in addition to other, related manifestations of violence in the media.

Having watched the last 40 minutes of the testimony given before the Committee on February 1, by 19 year old Serena Fleites it is clear that the representatives of Pornhub/Mindgeek have failed to protect the reputation and privacy of young people. They knowingly engaged in the distribution of child pornography, profited from it and should be charged accordingly under the Criminal Code.

But the **concept of consent** is an extremely misleading one. It is well known that technological skills today make it possible to simulate the impression of consent given in pornographic imagery when that has not been the case. There are myriad ways in which violence against women is justified on the basis of consent involving domestic violence (why did she stay), Provocative clothing (she made me do it) as well as the notion that a woman agrees to sell her body as a prostitute or in a porn film whether she needs the money or not. Where children are concerned the mere idea of “consent” is an oxymoron.

Because governments have consistently been reluctant to implement needed regulations to address the numerous forms of harmful content on the internet the proliferation of pornography has now reached crisis proportions. According to retired Project P, OPP officer, Jeremy Spence, with whom I work on the Anti Internet Child Exploitation Team (AICE-ET), by 2019 the number of complaints that police received had risen 1500 percent in the previous 10 years. It is estimated that 1 in 3000 children are sexually exploited every year. According to fellow team member and psychiatric nurse, Heidi Olson, who works in the child assault unit of a Kansas City based

hospital, before the age 18, 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys will have experienced sexual assault. Because children are getting their sexual education from porn sites, kids as young as 10 years of age are exploiting other kids. The most frequent sexual assault perpetrators, an estimated 95 percent, are 11-15 year old boys <internetsensefirst.com>. We have only to consider the accusations of sexual assault at St. Michael's College School for boys in Toronto in 2018 and subsequent charges laid. Indeed, children are stumbling onto porn websites doing their homework online. In other words, they are being sought out by sexual predators and producers of pornography, who are shaping their value systems on the subject of sex. In this context the **concept of "consent"** is a cruel joke.

### **Some basic facts about the harmful effects of pornography**

In the latter part of the last century, feminist scholar Catherine Mackinnon led the debate within the legal community, joining the themes of harm and equality in an effort to remove female pornography from the realm of free speech protection. Her assessment of the ongoing struggle against pornography, within the context of entrenched perceptions of civil liberties skewed in favor of dominant male interests, applies equally to the ongoing struggle against violence in the entertainment media. Just as pornography erotizes hierarchy, media violence glamorizes it. In both cases the central dynamic is inequality on the basis of dominant/submissive relations.

American researcher Edward Donnerstein and his colleagues, Penrod and Linz, reported in 1987 that "individuals exposed to certain types of materials respond with blunted sensitivity to violence against women, calloused attitudes about rape, and sexual arousal to rape depictions". ... Regarding x-rated material without violent depictions Donnerstein had this to say at a Minneapolis hearing in 1983 "You get increases in sex stereotypes and pretty much exactly the same things in terms of the attitudes that you get with the violent material . The only difference is the immediate increase in aggression". Other studies have concluded that pornography is addictive and leads to distorted ability to develop normal, healthy relationships.

According to American journalist and Princeton University professor, Chris Hedges, feminists have lost the fight against pornography. In his view the whole world has become pornified. In 2018 he said, "Men get off on porn from women being submissive. Who is more submissive than children? The inevitable route of all porn is child porn. And this is why organizations that fight child porn but do not fight adult porn are making a huge mistake". The dots need to be connected.

As you are now aware, this worldwide, billion dollar industry is dominated by one global IT distributor in particular, Mindgeek, started, in Montreal. Canada. As Nicholas Kristof, wrote in the *New York Times* on December 6<sup>th</sup> of last year, it is the 10<sup>th</sup> most popular website in the world and the third most influential digital presence on the Internet after FaceBook and Google. He challenged Prime Minister Trudeau, indeed all Canadians, to exercise some backbone in addressing this egregious scenario. Today, surveillance capitalism is increasingly being criticized on a number of levels. Especially urgent is the exploitive manner in which it is being directed at children. In this context, the legislation adopted in Quebec over a quarter of a century ago, that bans advertising to children on the basis of research showing harmful effects, should be implemented *and enforced* throughout the rest of Canada.

In the *Globe and Mail* on January 28, 2021, it was reported that Heritage Minister Steven Guilbeault says government rules are coming that will require social-media companies to take down illegal or hateful content. This must also include child pornography. Indeed, it should be all pornography. It is not only hate, normalized online, that is creating a toxic environment into which our children are being led but it is also a predatory environment involving sexual abuse and exploitation that is distorting their ability to develop normal, healthy relationships in life. As pointed out by Megan Walker, executive director of the London Abused Women's Centre in London, Ontario in the *Globe and Mail* on February 3, "The only way women and girls will be truly safe from being exploited on Pornhub is to shut it down". I would add that such a measure would also protect male children from vulnerability to sexual exploitation.

For several decades, the Canadian Government has stood by and allowed the virus of hate, misogyny, violent entertainment and pornographic content to mushroom on the Internet under the guise of "giving the technology a chance to develop". That must change. It is now painfully evident that such an approach has been naive and contrary to the public interest. We have allowed corporate interests to shape and distort our children's value systems under the guise of protecting freedom of expression. The widespread confusion over corporate freedom of enterprise and how it differs from free speech must be addressed and clarified. Implementation of appropriate regulations and legislation on internet use and misuse is long overdue.

Thank you for your attention.

## References

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