

ABUSES

## Pornhub promotes pedophilia, but exonerated by the media

LIFE AND BIOETHICS

21\_12\_2020



**Benedetta  
Frigerio**



The number of child sexual predators is growing. And it's growing because of porn, a business that runs legally on the internet and makes billions of dollars in revenues each year. Topping the list is Pornhub, the subject of several investigations which

demonstrate the website hosts millions of videos of minors, including children, being sexually trafficked, raped and tortured.

**It was the *New York Times* that reported the news.** The scoop was followed by Visa and Mastercard's decision to ban payments on these sites via their credit card systems. Later the online porn giant reacted by ensuring it would remove the vast majority of its films (only 4 of the 13 million videos remain). This is a staggering number. Hence, it's highly unlikely that Pornhub's owners were unaware of the crimes in which they are complicit. So, why is the investigation ongoing? And why, instead of convicting Pornhub's owners and shutting down their website, were only the incriminating videos removed? Finally, why was Pornhub's hypocritical statement that "the safety of our community is our top priority" enough to appease public opinion and make their perverse industry appear clean?

**Most of the mass media have exonerated Pornhub,** reducing the issue to questions of privacy, as if the main problem were videos uploaded without the legal consent of the subjects being filmed. Some Italian media outlets published headlines in reaction to this: "Pornhub removes half of online videos: they do not come from verified accounts and USA, Pornhub removes two thirds of its videos". In fact, in an article of *The Post*, we read: "In many cases the videos did not concern sexual acts, but abuse, violence and even rape." Yet, what are rapes if not violent sexual acts? And what about the fact that all this controversy started after complaints were filed by 40 sex trafficking victims who were filmed while abused and even detained in hotels where the filming took place. Is the problem really one of privacy or of the violence suffered and endorsed by Pornhub? How can we justify, for example, the story reported in the *New York Times* about Cali, a Chinese child adopted by an American family that forced her to appear in a child porn video when she was just 9 years old?

**To explain, however, why such the porn site tends to gets a pass,** *The Guardian* ran an article entitled "'Online incest porn is normalizing child abuse', say charities". In the article, Vanessa Morse, CEO of CEASE UK (Centre to End All Sexual Exploitation), stated: "The amount of money that the porn industry makes from these pseudo child abuse videos and rape fantasies is staggering." Suffice it to say that one video in which an adoptive father rapes his terrified daughter has had 50 million views, which means millions of dollars in earnings.

**Morse, who is worried that the British government is too soft in terms of sanctions and imposing bans,** stresses that in underage porn material, "it appears that pornography will be put into category 2, which is not the most severe. We find it

astonishing they wouldn't put it in the most severe category." Even so, the media, in addition to shifting the focus, are explicitly indulgent. Again, in *The Post* article, the writer argues that we should not "make the mistake of judging videos that show unconventional sexual practices, even violent or disturbing, as problematic or worthy of censorship". Too bad Morse points out that "the vast quantities of pseudo abuse material on porn sites is normalising extreme preferences."

**Indeed, the fact that Pornhub hasn't undergone a harsh trial is outrageous.** This is even not considering that there is a series, "made exclusively for Pornhub, where parents are shown abusing their underage foster children" (thereby legitimising incest), but also because "the minds of visitors who start with a few 'doses' of porn, then go in search of something increasingly extreme," Morse said. "The people watching [these videos] are being enticed into seeking out ever more extreme material and seeing it on a mainstream site such as Pornhub normalises behaviour that 10 years ago would have been considered deviant," stated Amanda Naylor, a manager at the non-profit organisation Barnado's, active in the field of child protection.

**Naylor added that for child predators,** "the normalisation and encouragement of [child abuse] can escalate behaviour" and that "fostered children are inherently vulnerable and they are being fetishised." Naylor's organization also denounced the growing number of victims of this market, both those abused and those who become predators because they are exposed from an early age to porn, which is easily accessible from any digital device. "We work with boys who have displayed harmful sexual behaviour and who have found themselves in the criminal justice system for re-enacting behaviours they have seen in porn: hitting, slapping, kicking, punching."

**Yet, authorities were well aware of the problem** long before the recent *New York Times* article. In 2018, Kansas City's Children's Mercy Hospital **revealed** that "that about half of predators (of minors) are underage." Jennifer Hansen, a paediatrician, added that "the striking thing is that a lot of this sexual abuse is violent" and that the "sexual abuse of someone is a learned behaviour." Hansen spoke of children being exposed to pornography as early as 4 or 5 years of age. The previous year, in 2017, British police made mention of 40,000 reports involving children who had raped other children (2,625 cases had occurred at school).

**Finally, as reported in another *Guardian* article,** "There has been a year-on-year rise in child abuse images found circulating online, and every month 900 children are safeguarded and around 700 men are ." Michael Sheath, who has worked in the field of rape rehabilitation for 33 years, describes the "dangerous cultural shift in the profile of

offenders, brought about by the enormous change that increasingly extreme pornography is having on the developing teenage mind."

**"Before the internet there was a ceiling on how much porn you could consume,** ... and there was a stigma on its consumption," added Sheath. Yet today, he said, "If you look at the videos on mainstream porn sites you can see 'teen' themes, 'mom and son' themes. To watch this you have already lowered your threshold of what is acceptable. Hence, Sheath debunks the common opinion that such child predators "are born pedophiles." He explained: "That's not my thought. I think a lot of the men we work with go down what I call a potentially escalating pathway....What we are seeing on a daily basis is the conflation of easy access to hardcore and deviant pornography and an interest in child molestation. The link is unambiguous." That's why the Child Rescue Coalition has launched a mantra: "Stop calling it child pornography, it's child sexual abuse material."

**If they were consistent, both television and newspapers** would be filling their morning headlines with this scandal. Yet, it is well known that to place limits on sexuality (unless aimed at publicly deriding priests) would contradict the very progressive powers they serve.