

## **ENGAGEMENT WITH SEXUALLY EXPLICIT INTERNAL MATERIALS (SEIM) AND ITS MORAL IMPLICATIONS AMONG THE YOUTH OF CAVITE, PHILIPPINES**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The ubiquity of digital technology these days results to ease of acquiring knowledge. For instance, with the Internet, information becomes too handy and accessible particularly the youth who are considered, the "digital natives" of this era. This opens the door for any form of influences to creep into the lives of the youth. When compared two decades ago, pornography today is so rampant online. In a study, every second 28,258 users are watching pornography on the internet and 35% of all internet downloads are related to pornography. [1] With this and perhaps, other reason, moved the Philippine government to block internet users from accessing the world's most popular pornographic websites. The blocking happened only 10 days after a survey showed that for the third year running Filipinos had spent more time, per visit, which is 12 minutes and 45 seconds on Pornhub than any other nation. Access to Pornhub, Xvideos, Redtube and several other sites was forbidden on PCs, laptops and mobile phones. Users were redirected to a page notifying them of such a ban. This act was in pursuant to Republic Act 9775 or the Anti-Child Pornography Law. [2]

Assumptions were made that online pornography, or in this study, it is interchangeable with, Sexually Explicit Internal Material (SEIM), is one of the causes why there is an increasing incidence of rapes and related crimes, premarital sex, and teenage pregnancies. Lo and Wei (2005) citing McMurdo (1997) noted that concerns over the excessive growth of Internet pornography have given rise to a moral panic. They argued that evidence in the literature has established an association of exposure to pornographic materials with sexual arousal and cognitive effects, especially changes in attitudes (such as disinhibition) and values (such as sexual callousness). Various meta-analytic studies corroborated the proposition that consumption of either nonviolent or violent pornography may lead to some serious attitudinal and behavioral effects. Hence, policymakers, parents, and educators fear cyberporn would cause greater social harm than traditional pornography. [3] However, in a research of Luder, Pittet, Berchtold, and et. al (2011), it was argued that pornography exposure does not seem to have an impact on risky

sexual behavior among adolescents. [4] These inconsistencies warrant further studies on this issue.

Studies have shown the pervasiveness of online pornography among the youth, may it be wanted or unwanted. Wolak, Mitchell, and Finkelhor (2007) noted that 42% of youth internet users had been exposed to online pornography and of those, 66% reported only unwanted exposure. [5] The profile of those exposed shows that 93% of boys and 62% of girls were exposed to online pornography during adolescence. Exposure prior to age 13 was relatively uncommon. Moreover, boys were more likely to be exposed at an earlier age, to see more extreme images (e.g. rape, child pornography), and to view pornography more often, while girls reported more involuntary exposure.[6] Interestingly, however, frequent users of internet pornography in Korea were more likely to be older males with differences in living arrangements and perceived economic status of the family. They were heavy internet users with mental health issues such as the higher likelihood of sadness, suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, high stress, and lower likelihood of feeling happiness. [7]

Furthermore, some studies have revealed that pornography use increases sharply with age, especially among boys. It was also noted that pornography consumption is weaker at higher levels of religious attendance, particularly among boys, and religious attendance also weakens age-based increases in pornography consumption for both boys and girls. In general, pornography use increases across adolescence into young adulthood, but immersion in a religious community can help weaken these increases. [8] There is also a study that shows that online pornography consumption affects the relationship of married couples in the Philippines as it has an adverse effect on the relationship commitment of married Filipino couples. Specifically, it weakens relationship commitment that eventually leads to an unstable relationship among couples.[9] Despite studies like that of Bernarte, Bartolata and Laureta (2015), which suggested how sensual print media such as books, magazines, and tabloids entice male college students in a Philippine university as this help them gain knowledge about sex despite less exposure to them because of the existence of modern media like the internet,[10] these are not enough to explain why the Filipino youth, engaged into watching online pornography or SEIM.

Hence, this study aims to explore how the Filipino youth, specifically, those in Cavite, and who have been involved in online pornography, experience this issue. This also explains why the youth engage themselves in this form of entertainment. Thus, this study answers the questions: what is the demographic profile of the participants, why do the youth watch online pornography, who and what influence them to involve with online pornography, and what do they feel after watching an online pornographic material/s? Aside from these associations among variables are also studied. Further, this study also explores morality issues relevant to online pornography and

how do the youth see the effects of this activity to how they look at the meaning of morality. Knowing these things may help academic institutions, church, and families to address this challenge that the Filipino youth are struggling with.

## METHOD

The study used the sequential transformative design, which is a type of mixed method approach of research[11], in which 240 participants, who are engaged with online pornography, and residing in Cavite, participated and answered a researcher-made questionnaire ( $\alpha=.871$ ). This study only enlisted as participants those who were self-confessed online pornography aficionados or customers, who are adolescents and are willing to participate. This questionnaire consists of demographic profile, reasons why they watch online pornography, what influenced them about online pornography, type of online pornography, and what they would feel after watching. To enrich discussion of the topic, interviews were made with five participants who also answered the questionnaire. Results of the qualitative phase of this research serve to explain further the findings of the quantitative phase.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

*On the demographic profile of participants*

**Table 1: Demographic Profile of Participants**

Demographics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender:</b> Male	161	67.1
Female	79	32.9
<b>Age:</b> Below 12	7	2.9
12-14	14	5.8
15-17	67	27.9
18-20	152	63.3
<b>Family Tie:</b> Close	177	73.8
Broken	51	21.3
Others	12	5.1

Majority of the participants in this study were male (67.1%) and only 32.9% were female (Table 1). This corroborates the study of Wolak, Mitchell, and Finkelhor (2007) that showed that boys are more exposed to SEIM than girls. [4] Ybarra and Mitchell (2005) asserted that seekers of pornography, both online and offline, are significantly more likely to be male. [12] It is also noted that majority of those exposed to SEIM or online pornography are those who belong to ages 18 to 20 years old. Rasmussen and Bierman (2016) made this certain that exposure to online

pornography increases with age from adolescence to adulthood. However, it is interesting to note that majority of the participants belong to a closely knit family. This implies that despite the strong influence of the family to adolescents, they are still exposed to online pornography. It can be surmised that either the family has a low influence on the Filipino youth or the Filipino families failed to influence the adolescents specifically on the issue of online pornography. Developmental theorists like Erickson and Freud appealed to the concept of independence and autonomy particularly in this developmental age of adolescence. Once a growing child begins to assert independence, familial influence diminishes as the child wants to discover the world he/she is into, and that includes online pornography. One reason may also be the failure of the Filipino families to influence an adolescent away from online pornography. They may be are closely knit but on issues about sex, Filipinos usually are reserved and sometimes non-indulgent. Moreover, in the study of De Irala, et. al. (2009), it was posited that students obtained information about love and sexuality mainly from friends, though they value the opinions of their parents. [13]

*For reasons why the youth watch online pornography*

**Table 2: Reasons why the youth watch online pornography**

Reasons	Frequency	Percentage
Boredom	123	50.6
Peer Pressure	30	12.3
Stimulation/sensation	42	17.3
Hobby	39	16
Curiosity	57	23.5
Educational	27	11.1
Others	16	6.6

\*p= 0.00 (Statistically significant using  $\chi^2$ )

\*significant at  $\alpha=0.05$

Boredom (50.6%) is the statistically significant ( $p=0.00$ ), main reason why the Filipino youth watch online pornography as well as the curiosity (23.5%) (Table 2). Studies exemplify that there is a significant relationship that exists among teens between frequent pornography use and feelings of loneliness including major depression.[1] This is quite different to the study of Bernarte and et. al (2015) in which male college students read sensual print media to gain awareness on sex. However, both studies found a common ground in curiosity about sex which is also one of the main reasons for Bernarte, et.al's study (53.8%). [9] Moreover, curiosity about sexual behavior increases--particularly as puberty approaches--and children may begin to seek out sexual content in television, movies, and printed material. [14]

Mr. D was straightforward when he explicated that he has been watching SEIM to satisfy his natural urges, his sexual needs. To him, the human body is set to have a mate, therefore, it has the capability to feel the sexual urge and arousal.

*On influences among youth about online pornography*

**Table 3: Influence to Learn about Online Pornography**

Influence	Frequency	Percentage
Friends	155	63.8
Classmates	93	38.3
Partner	29	11.9
Online Ads	48	19.8
Relatives	14	5.8

\*p=0.00 (Statistically significant using  $\chi^2$ )

\*significant at  $\alpha=0.05$

Friends (63.8%) and classmates (38.3%) are the most influential people why the youth watch online pornography (Table 3). De Irala, et. al. (2009) corroborate that mainly the youth are influenced by friends on issues about sexuality. One participant, Mr. M even shared he heard it from his classmates when he was in grade six but nobody forced him to engage into SEIM but only himself. He discovered it himself when he was 12 years old. The same thing happened with Mr. D because nobody influenced him only himself while watching a nude scene from the movie, "Snakes on a Plane" when he was still a precocious 11-year old.

Surprisingly, Mr. A confided that he learned about SEIM from his father indirectly through DVDs and pornographic materials on his laptop. This was reinforced by stories of his classmates, neighbors, and playmates. Although, it is also noteworthy to mention that online advertisements (19.8%), which are very pervasive on the internet, are also influential.

*On what the youth feel after watching online pornography*

**Table 4: Feeling after Watching**

<b>Feeling</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Entertained	103	42.4
Wanting for more	43	17.4
Afraid	25	10.3
Awkward	64	26.3
Fulfilled	61	25.1
Wanted to apply in real life	42	17.3
Guilty	28	11.5
Nervous	29	11.9
Others	11	4.5

\*p=0.00 (Statistically significant using  $\chi^2$ )

\*significant at  $\alpha=.05$

Among the 240 participants, 42.4% claimed to be entertained by the SEIM they watched. Mr. M attested to this as he also shared that after watching SEIM, particularly those materials which has a good storyline, he felt relieved and entertained. However, 26.3% felt awkward and 25.1% felt fulfillment after watching. Generally, the youth enjoyed it but this could never dispel the negative feelings such as awkwardness, dissatisfaction as they want for more (17.4%) and apply it to real life (17.3%), guilt (11.5%) and nervousness (11.9%). Mr. D even shared that after watching SEIM and eventually masturbated, he felt disgusted about what he just did, as if the effects of certain drugs were gone. However, he emphasized it was not guilt feeling because for him it is just a release of his natural urge as a normal teenager. This is opposed to what Mr. A revealed, as he felt the guilt after doing it. To him, he was guilty because there was no pay-off of what he did. He also shared that when he was still younger, he was very active in various church activities.

For Filipinos who considered themselves as the most Christian in this part of Asia, the feeling of guilt is not quite discernible with only 11.5%. According to Mr. M, "I have no feeling of guilt after I watch online pornography. Why? It's normal for boys." When asked if it is only normal for boys and not for girls, he quipped, "I hope that it is also normal for girls." He added that he was not reared by his parents with so many inhibitions and limitations when it comes to issues like sex and pornography. His attitude towards sex is casual and according to him, "no stigma attached." Positive effects overshadow the feelings of guilt and even remorse. Even the feeling of awkwardness is not quite very distinct when compared to entertainment and fulfillment. Conscience relates to guilt feelings. Thus, online pornography to some extent subtly obliterates the conscience. After all, "sex is casual, no stigma attached", as Mr. M added.

*On the association between gender and reasons why the youth watch SEIM*

**Table 5: Association Between Gender and Reasons**

Variables	Df	Chi-square value	p-value	Q.I.	Decision
Gender and Reason 1 (Boredom)	1	.467	.494	NS	Accept Ho
Gender and Reason 2 (Peer Pressure)	1	.218	.640	NS	Accept Ho
<b>Gender and Reason 3 (Stimulation/sensation)</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4.435</b>	<b>.035</b>	<b>Significant</b>	<b>Reject Ho</b>
Gender and Reason 4 (Hobby)	1	.468	.494	NS	Accept Ho
Gender and Reason 5 (Curiosity)	1	.061	.806	NS	Accept Ho
Gender and Reason 6 (Educational)	1	.843	.358	NS	Accept Ho
Gender and Reason 7	1	.487	.485	NS	Accept Ho

Among all the identified reasons why the youth watches SEIM, gender significantly influences stimulation (Table 5). Knowing the demographic profile of the respondents, in which majority are male, stimulation emerged as the most statistically significant factor ( $\chi^2=4.435$ ,  $p=.035$ ) at 5% level of significance. In a study, it was revealed that males who have been exposed to SEIM or online pornography were more likely to be sensation seekers [3]. Freud's Psychosexual Theory clearly asserted that adolescents during the Genital stage, which extends from puberty through adulthood, are more concerned with adult sexual interests which can turn to heterosexual relationships. [15] Sexual desires, which were repressed and remain dormant during the latency stage, are now awakened due to puberty. Genitals become the source for pleasure and teens develop and explore attraction to opposite sex,[16] thus, watching naked women in the net gives them great pleasure because of the stimulation and sensation, which is in part hormonal by nature.

*On the association between gender and influences to the youth*

**Table 6: Association between Gender and Influence**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Df</b>	<b>Chi square value</b>	<b>p-value</b>	<b>Q.I.</b>	<b>Decision</b>
Gender and Influence (Friends) 1	1	.086	.769	NS	Accept Ho
Gender and Influence (Classmates) 2	1	.030	.863	NS	Accept Ho
Gender and Influence (Partner) 3	1	.424	.515	NS	Accept Ho
Gender and Influence (Online ads) 4	1	2.080	.149	NS	Accept Ho
Gender and Influence (others) 5	1	.889	.346	NS	Accept Ho

It can be gleaned from Table 6 that gender does not determine significantly various influences what influences the Filipino youth towards watching SEIM or online pornography. Male or female, influences remain to be similar, as what men experience, are also experienced by the female population. All are exposed to influential factors such as friends, classmates, partners, online advertisements, and others, as Lo and Wei (2010) argued that 38% of adolescents had some exposure to Internet pornography [3] whatever might have influenced them.

**Table 7: Association between Gender and Feeling after Watching**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Df</b>	<b>Chi square value</b>	<b>Phi-value</b>	<b>p-value</b>	<b>Q.I.</b>	<b>Decision</b>
Gender and Feeling	9	36.8	.392	.00	S	Reject

Table 4 shows what the youth felt after watching SEIM which shows entertained, awkward and fulfilled as the top three highest. When grouped according to gender, statistics show that the result the feeling they usually have after watching depends significantly on gender ( $\phi=.392$ ,  $p=.00$ ) (Table 7). Moreover, from the same statistical results, there were 78 males who were allegedly entertained after watching SEIM than girls ( $f=18$ ). Male felt wanting for more ( $f=13$ )

than female (f=6), female are more afraid (f=10) than male (f=3), female felt awkward (f=25) than male (f=22), male felt fulfilled (f=15) than female (f=5), male felt the need to apply it to real life (f=11) than female (f=3), female felt guilty (f=5) than male (f=3), and male felt nervous (f=8) than female (f=2).

The study suggests that male usually exhibit those feelings which are usually associated with perceived ethical norms of a society that may find it offensive at least for Filipinos such as treating pornography as an entertaining medium, covetousness, fulfillment in those things considered to be unacceptable, except the nervousness. On the other hand, the female exhibited feelings that are acceptable such as fear, awkwardness, and guilt.

**Table 8: Association between Family Tie and Reason**

Reasons	Type of Family Tie	Df	Chi- square value	p-value	Q.I.	Decision
Boredom	Close-92 Broken-27	3	1.64	.65	NS	Accept Ho
<b>Peer pressure</b>	Close-20 Broken-7	<b>3</b>	<b>8.37</b>	<b>.04</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>Reject Ho</b>
Stimulation and sensation	Close-32 Broken-8	3	.93	.82	NS	Accept Ho
Hobby	Close-30 Broken-9	3	2.47	.48	NS	Accept Ho
Curiosity	Close-44 Broken-12	3	1.85	.60	NS	Accept Ho
Educational	Close-21 Broken-5	3	.55	.91	NS	Accept Ho

Peer pressure is associated statistically with a family tie ( $\chi^2=8.37, p=.04$ ), that is, youth who belongs to close family tie considers peer pressure the main reason why one is into SEIM. Considering the nature of peer pressure as compared with other reasons, peer pressure is external and the rest are more of personal and internal. This suggests that adolescents reared in a close family tie usually have stronger personal disposition and self-control unless one there is an external factor such as peer pressure, in which they lose their sense of control. Filipino families, as implied, are successful in etching an influence to some extent until children succumbed to a stronger peer pressure. Stepp (2013) citing William Damon's book titled, "The Moral Child: Nurturing Children's Natural Moral", put it: "Children participate in social relations very early, practically at birth. Their moral thoughts and feelings are an inevitable consequence of these

early relations and others that will arise throughout life." The family is the single most important context for this development. Stepp citing Gopnik argued that what Jean Piaget thought that a child does not have genuine moral knowledge as they cannot take the perspective of others, infer intentions, and follow abstract rules, was not totally true as modern science could attest that children are born empathic and can identify with other people and recognize that their own feelings are shared by others. Researchers now say that people are born with a general capacity to tell the difference between good and bad, and with somewhat of a preference for good over bad. In this case, the family has a vital role to play--in the imprinting of moral identity to their growing children [17].

**Table 9: Association between Family Tie and Influence**

<b>Influence</b>	<b>Type of Family Tie</b>	<b>Df</b>	<b>Chi square value</b>	<b>p-value</b>	<b>Q.I.</b>	<b>Decision</b>
<b>Friends</b>	<b>Close-125 Broken-27</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>15.16</b>	<b>.002</b>	<b>S</b>	<b>Reject Ho</b>
Classmates	Close-105 Broken-50	1	.09	.77	NS	Accept Ho
Partner	Close-24 Broken-5	3	2.26	.52	NS	Accept Ho
Online ads.	Close-34 Broken-13	3	2.22	.53	NS	Accept Ho

In Table 9, only friends are statistically significant among the potential influencing factors that might have caused the youth to be engaged in SEIM ( $\chi^2 = 15.16, p = .002$ ). For those who were reared in a close family, usually, have friends influencing them to be curious and learn about SEIM. This corroborates the previous Table 8. However, a contrasting factor can be seen with other influences. Although, "classmates" has 105, and is second to "friends." However, apart from friends, everything is not statistically significant. In his series, "Guardrails", Andy Stanley posited that friends influence the direction and quality of our lives. He continued, "The thing that makes friendship so great is the very thing that makes friendship so dangerous." He contends that people drop their guard when they are around those who accept them. When they feel completely accepted, they are much more open to the influence of people around them. An ancient proverb aptly puts it: "Walk with the wise and become wise. For the companion of fools suffers harm [18].

*On morality issues and SEIM*

There were themes about morality that emerged in the study after a series of in-depth interviews:

*Ambivalent morality: SEIM is neither good nor bad.* Engagement with SEIM or online pornography promotes ambivalent morality to those who are into it. Mr. M puts it, "Before, everything is either black or white, but nowadays, it is gray...I have this ambivalence on morality issues." To him, online pornography is composed of just actors who play their roles in the movie. It is nothing personal. It is only a job...so why associate it with morality?" He believed that as long as nobody is hurt then it is acceptable to him. To him, nobody is born good or bad. It is how the environment raises one. It is more of nurture than nature. This found support with Holtz (2016) in which she maintained that nurture is more important than nature when it comes to explaining human behavior [19]. Mr. M explicated this argument further by noting that people are equal; nobody is higher than the other...nobody is more moral than the other. To him, watching online pornography and even sexual acts are not immoral and bad, it is the environment that judges whether it is good or bad. The environment can be the context and intent the act is done. To a society who thinks of an act to be either black or white, Mr. M further explained, empathy is lost. This endangers the people to some extent. Emphatic and similar view pervades various thoughts about moral relativism as Wong (2006) posited that moral ambivalence, in conjunction with a natural conception of morality supports the conclusion that there is no single true morality [20].

*Society dictates whether SEIM is good or bad.* To a participant, no one is morally upright as the society judges whether an act is good or bad. Nobody in this world is naturally good or bad. It is always the societal norms that determine the goodness and badness of an act, like engaging with SEIM. All people are all filthy. As Mr. M replied with a rhetorical question, "What is a man but a pile of secrets?"

*Morality with SEIM changes with age.* "When I was younger, I used to be very religious and thought of SEIM to be bad but as I grew older, I tried and successfully thought of it as natural and normal. It's like preparing the body for a sexual mate in the future." Mr. D added, "Religion for me became a blockade to this thing. If you don't use it, you lose it," alluding to the male sex organ.

*Engaging in SEIM is not in all be all.* Engaging with SEIM is fine if it gives one benefits but it is not everything in this world. There are more things to do that are more fulfilling than SEIM. There are more adolescents who are addicted to SEIM as their lives revolve around it.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

There are many reasons why the Filipino youth watches SEIM, however, boredom emerged as statistically significant. Also, friends and classmates influence the youth to watch SEIM. Moreover, the youth watch SEIM to be entertained and they usually meet this objective as they

watch SEIM. Of the sample, male youth are stimulated more than the female through SEIM. Significantly, gender determines how the youth feel after watching SEIM. Furthermore, a youth who belongs to a family with a closer tie has a strong disposition except when they are confronted with peer pressure, especially from friends, that they give in. To the youth, SEIM is neither good nor bad but the society makes it good or bad. However, as the youth becomes more mature, their views about morality change. They become more relax as they believe that engaging in SEIM is not the all in all in this but is just one of those that the people may enjoy,

This study can be improved when the samples recruited are more mixed.

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