Virtual Reality Pornography - Is Virtual Reality Distracting From Actual Reality?

Introduction - Sex in virtual reality (VR) is increasing in demand, with SexTech an industry worth $30 billion and expected to rise to more than $50 billion (Forbes 2020), VR is a sizeable chunk of that. When it comes to what people search for in relation to VR (See graph, fig1.), porn takes the top spot (Mashable 2020) proving it is certainly a hot topic! The question is, does Sex in Virtual Reality detract from actual reality and does it contribute to the hyper-sexualisation and degradation of women? These are important questions that will be explored in this poster.

What is Virtual Reality? - Virtual reality provides users a way to connect with an environment that is not real and is a computer-generated virtual world. It is used in a variety of things including but not limited to; Gaming, The Sex Industry, In Business and increasingly used in therapy (Nursing, 2020). Seemingly, as technology advances, the way we use VR advances too. VR Sex is described by Wiki as "A technology that allows the user to receive tactile sensations from remote participants or fictional characters through the use of computer-controlled sex toys" (Wiki, 2020)

Who Are The Users? - VR is used by millions globally for business and for pleasure. A staggering 1/3 of VR owners have used it for watching pornography. According to Oberlo (Oberlo, 2019), one in five US residents will use a VR Headset and noting that companies such as Ikea and Architectural companies, are increasingly introducing it into their core business for presentations and sales. Another important use is in forensics to identify sexual deviances. (Renaud,

The Equipment :

- Headset/Goggles
- Joysticks/Controllers
- Sex Aides
- Toys
- Gloves,
- Haptics,
- Suits
- Immersive Sounds

So, who are the vendors? - When looking at VR, Occulus is an obvious leader, brought by Facebook in 2014 (builtin, 2019) and since the purchase, releasing market leading products to pave the way for the real and immersive experience, there are many more that are revolutionising the way we experience VR, and not just for porn, including HTC, Samsung and Playstation (Fig. 2.) When it comes to pornography in VR, VR Bangers seems to be a fan favourite with Pornhub coming in at number 8 on LA Weekly's list. (LA Weekly, 2020)
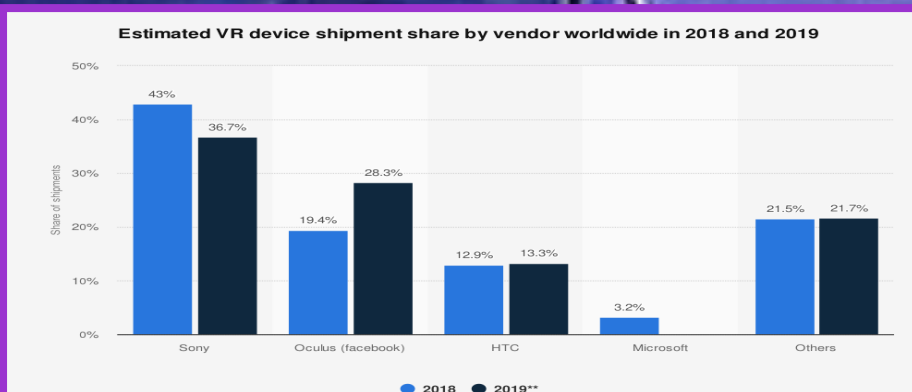
Fig. 1.

VR Porn & The Web — A study into the user trends and statistics of virtual reality porn and the web.

VR SEARCHES ON GOOGLE — "VR Porn" is the #1 generic search term associated with virtual reality. VR Apps, VR Videos, VR Games, VR Porn

VR SITES: PORN VS NON-PORN — 60% — 30 of the top 50 VR sites are adult.

TOP VR SITES BY MONTHLY VISITS
1. VRPorn.com
2. Oculus.com
3. BaDoinkVR.com
4. VirtualRealPorn.com
5. Vive.com

TOTAL VR PORN SITE TRAFFIC — ↑50%

TOP TEN COUNTRIES

Estimated VR device shipment share by vendor worldwide in 2018 and 2019
- Sony 43% / 36.7%
- Oculus (facebook) 19.4% / 28.3%
- HTC 12.9% / 13.3%
- Microsoft 3.2%
- Others 21.5% / 21.7%

2018 / 2019**

Source: TrendForce © Statista 2020

Fig. 2.

Conclusion – VR Porn provides individuals a way to explore their sexuality and engage with individuals in a situation that may or may not happen in real life. Other positive ways to use it has been within a therapy setting to help sexual violence survivors, it is also used within a forensic setting to identify deviant sexual preferences. Many good things have come of Virtual Reality and the internet in general, it is time we looked at how to make that space a positive and safe place for all, more notably, the high percentage of women that have been harassed, degraded or abused in an online setting. We have rules and laws for actual reality, it is time we have the same for the world of Virtual Reality. I fully believe that, right now, education is the most important step, with clarifying laws and rules following closely behind and the software coming up in third, when considering having this type of software implemented at design stage in VR headsets, what financial impact on businesses would it have? This could be a large barrier but if championed in the right way by government and law makers, it could be successful. Although it may seem a mammoth task right now, it will pay off, it is time we champion for clear barriers, rules and laws for our virtual world, to maintain our humanity, to maintain our well-being and most importantly, our actual reality.

So, What's The Issue? - A very real issue and question surrounding Sex in VR is regarding sexism, sexual fantasies/deviances and the sexual violence involving women, not just in real life, in a virtual reality too. Is SexTech, particularly when using VR, further contributing to men's unrealistic expectations of women and does it encourage peoples more sadistic sexual ideals? You only have to look at the project 'Girls of Arcadia' to know that when it comes to Virtual Reality Pornography, expectation vs reality are worlds apart. Perpetua Neo makes a good point when talking to Insider, VR Porn provides immediate satisfaction and is much simpler than having to date or impress a real person, this could create a huge and worrying detachment from reality (Dodgson, 2020). In addition to this, stats show that almost 50% of women VR users have experienced virtual harassment, you only have to look at #Gamergate to understand that sexism in VR and real life are very much a real problem of today's world, it is our job to shine a light on these topics and provide real-time solutions to issues that affect everyone. Cheri Lynne Carr (Carr, 2018) in her article of Love, Consent, and Arousal: Deterritorialising Virtual Sex addresses many issues. The big question we have now is, do we leave it to chance and hope that the highlighted issues resolve themselves? Is there a non-invasive solution that allows people to maintain privacy and individuality while ensuring it highlights any ethical issues? Finally, when it comes to world of Virtual Reality Pornography, who gets to decide what is right and wrong ? A more worrying figure that has come out of a recent poll (Davey, 2020) suggests that 59% of women polled experienced sexual harassment online and Facebook, who owns the Occulus Quest VR device, was the most common platform on which sexual harassment took place. Another point to note is that 1993 was the year that the worlds first 'Virtual Rape' took place and yet here we are,, more than 20 years later, with no definitive solution, education or laws. (Barflied & Blitz, 2018)

SEX

The Solution –

⇒ When looking at how we can change and/or how we view the world, education is always an important factor. It could help to define individual behaviours, especially towards women, to educate the general population from a young age on sexism, harassment and the dangers of porn addiction, by incorporating the subject of pornography along with sexual behavioural subjects in to sex education.

⇒ Another solution could be to introduce Legislation that would hold people to account if something deemed to be illegal or unethical were to be carried out, which then leads on to what could be classed as illegal/unethical? Who gets this to decide? In addition to the legislation, I would propose that ethical laws be developed in the field of VR pornography.

⇒ This leads me on to my final offering of a possible solution; Specialised Security Software, a precise security software that, using algorithms, would highlight any abuse of VR/software and the people carrying out the abuse, to ensure that any illegal activity would be discovered and punished. Granted this is a very big task and may take years to create and implement but once created can only evolve to better serve humanity.

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