Associations between Sexually Explicit Material (SEM) use and aggression, moral disengagement and sexual/relationship satisfaction

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Abstract

Sexually Explicit Material can be defined as content which contains partial or full nudity and sexual behaviours, that is depicted and/or described through magazines, novels, pictures and videos both online and offline and may increase sexual arousal. This study aims to investigate the possible associations between the use of sexually explicit material and aggression, moral disengagement, and sexual/relationship satisfaction. The survey was administered online through social media and completed by 155 participants. The survey in its entirety (75 questions) took approximately 20 minutes to complete. The design of the survey employed the BPAQ (1992), Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement Scale (Bandura et al, 1996) and Hendricks’ Relationship Assessment Scale (1988). Overall, statistical analysis revealed a significant association in moral disengagement scores and use of SEM. In conclusion, there was no significant association between SEM use and aggression and sexual/relationship satisfaction. However, SEM use was significant with scores of moral disengagement, suggesting that use of SEM may result in moral corruption.
INTRODUCTION

Sexually Explicit Material (SEM)

Adequately defining ‘Sexually Explicit Material’ (SEM) has proved to be a difficult task. Over a decade ago, Fisher and Barak (2001) defined SEM as a nonspecific term that presents sexual content without deliberately attempting to censor it. Their definition was extended by emphasizing that SEM is often used as a euphemism for pornography, including sexual intercourse and uncovered genitalia (e.g., video, written material, photography, art). In 2008, Brewster and Wylie defined SEM as “photographic images of male and female figures who are nude, and images of sexual acts.” This general definition fails, however, to consider content such as videos depicting people engaging in sexual activities. More recently, Peter and Valkenburg (2009) defined SEM as content that “depicts sexual activities in unconcealed ways, often with close-ups with (aroused) genitals and of oral, anal, or vaginal penetration”. Peter and Valkenburg’s definition of SEM fails to include milder content that can be considered potentially arousing, for example, depictions of male or female figures who have their genitalia concealed. Furthermore, content does not necessarily need to show sexual activities to be considered SEM—suggestive sexual activities would suffice. Examples of this can be seen in advertisements of half-naked individuals engaging with each other in a suggestive manner. While these numerous definitions show similarities, it is clear that there is yet to be a distinct and concrete definition decided upon. For the purposes of this study, Sexually Explicit Material is defined as content which contains partial or full nudity and sexual behaviours, that is depicted and/or described through magazines, novels, pictures and videos both online and offline and may increase sexual arousal.

The impacts of Sexually Explicit Material have of late been a major topic of interest in the field of psychology. Until recently, internet usage was confined to just computers that used telephone lines as a point of access. Modern developments in technology have expanded internet usage capabilities, with the introduction of smartphones, game consoles, laptops and other electronic devices. Access to pornography was once only limited to magazines, videos or DVDs—presently an individual can acquire pornography simply through the variety of electronic devices available to them. Internet-enabled devices have haphazardly allowed people of all ages to encounter, consume, create, and distribute sexually explicit content, and a growing body of data reveal these phenomena
are increasing in frequency for people worldwide (Bridges & Morokoff, 2011; Fisher & Barak, 2001; Flood, 2007; Goodson, McCormick, & Evans, 2000). These findings have also been documented by other researchers, who have commented on the correlation between the expansion and growth of the internet, and the increased activity of peoples’ frequency of use with SEM (Gould, 1992; Hald & Malamuth, 2008; Haggstrom-Nordin, Sanberg, Hanson, & Tyden, 2006; Lo & Wei, 2005). With the increasing abundance and availability of SEM in the last decade, researchers are beginning to focus on the ways in which adults, and young adults in particular, are being impacted by SEM. These impacts include sexual preferences, behaviours and satisfaction (Morgan, 2011), sexual socialization and satisfaction (Stulhofer, 2010), and aggressive behavioural tendencies (Yang & Youn, 2012).

**Effects of use of SEM**

Research on the effects of using SEM has indicated a wide variety of resulting behaviours. Firstly, it is important to note the possible reasons as to why people use SEM. Research by Butler et al (2011) showed that both male and female participants reported very similar reasons for viewing pornography, with “wanting the sexual excitement” found as the most common for use. Butler et al. also discovered that a high percentage of women reported “never looking for pornography on purpose,” suggesting that there is a great discrepancy with regard to reasons for viewing pornography among women.

Over 25 years ago, Koop (1987) drew conclusions from a consensus that pornography does stimulate attitudes and behaviour that lead to gravely negative consequences for individuals and for society. These outcomes impair the mental, emotional, and physical health of children and adults and may thus contribute significantly to the morbidity burden in our society. Numerous studies have found a variety of primarily adverse effects, including “wrecking marriages,” negatively changing men’s perceptions of women and women’s perceptions of themselves, and sexual addiction (Paul, 2005). Evidence has shown that pornography use can negatively impact attachment trust in the adult pair-bond relationship of heterosexual married couples (Zitzman & Butler, 2009). With regard to unmarried couples, a higher frequency of men’s sexual media use was correlated with negative sexual and relationship satisfaction in men, while a higher frequency of women’s sexual media use was correlated with positive sexual and relationship satisfaction in their male partners (Bridges & Morokoff, 2010). Hald & Malamuth (2008) investigated the self-perceived effects of pornography
consumption using a novel measure called the “Pornography Consumption Effect Scale.” This assessed participants’ reports of how pornography has affected them personally in many areas, including their sexual knowledge, attitudes toward sex, attitudes toward and perception of the opposite sex, sex life, and general quality of life. Across all areas investigated, participants reported only small, if any, negative effects, with men reporting slightly more negative effects than women. Weaver et al. (2011) found similar results, with individuals indicating engagement in this behaviour (SEM use) yielding higher depressive symptoms, more diminished mental and physical health days per month, a lower health status, and a poorer quality of life. These associations did not vary significantly by gender. These results display minor negative differences in relation to overall sexual attitudes and perceptions.

Due to the increasing prevalence of the use of SEM among adolescents, much discussion and debate has focused on the availability, content, and impact of SEM. Over the last decade, a number of studies have focused on the effects of SEM among adolescents, with many findings indicating more negative than positive effects associated with the use of SEM. Owens et al. (2012) suggested that youths who consume pornography may develop unrealistic sexual values and beliefs, and findings of the study indicated higher levels of permissive sexual attitudes, sexual preoccupation, and earlier sexual experimentation as being correlated with higher frequency of pornography use. Adolescents who use pornography were found to have lower levels of social integration, increases in behavioural conduct problems, and increases in levels of delinquent behaviour, depressive symptoms, and decreased emotional bonding with their caregivers. The study also revealed that females reported feeling physically inferior to the women being depicted in the material they were viewing, and males feeling that they may not be as virile or able to perform to the same standard as the men that were being displayed in the material that they were viewing (Owens et al., 2012). Short et al. (2012) also found negative effects of internet pornography (IP) use, such as impairments in interpersonal, financial, and occupational functioning, emotional problems, and sexual dissatisfaction.

Despite the vast amount of research surrounding the negative effects of SEM use, there have been findings that also suggest positive effects of SEM use. Short et al. (2011) conducted a “Review of Internet Pornography Use Research” from the last decade, emphasizing the effects of using internet pornography as being widespread. In addition to negative effects such as relationship and interpersonal distress, it was important to recognize positive effects such as increases in sexual knowledge, and attitudes towards
sex. The body of research on the effects of SEM use suggests that negative effects outweigh the positive, bringing to focus the potential damage that may be caused long-term for frequent users and those involved. The aim of this study is to determine whether SEM is significantly associated with participants' levels of aggression, moral disengagement, and sexual/relationship satisfaction.

**Aggression and SEM**

Aggression levels among people who use SEM is a topic that has received continuous attention. Most research to date has focused predominantly on males rather than females. With growing concern over the possible implications for males, Yang & Youn (2012) looked at the Effects of Exposure to Pornography on Male Aggressive Behavioural Tendencies and found that the facilitative effect (deciding to throw darts at a number of selected pictures of faces) of aggression was significant for all three groups exposed to pornography. This effect was especially obvious in those groups exposed to violent pornography. It was determined that the three groups exposed to neutral stimuli, nonviolent pornography, and sadomasochistic pornography showed no targeting differences between male and female faces, but the participants exposed to violent pornography selected more female faces than male ones as targets. This suggests that exposure to violent pornography increased dart throwing at female faces. This study focused exclusively on males in their experiment and neglected to examine possible comparative effects on females, possibly as a result of the assumption that females may not experience sexual aggression or aggressive behavioural tendencies. Further studies that investigated sexual aggression found that SEM use can be associated with the dehumanization of men, women, and children and in particular objectification of women who are portrayed both in advertising and pornography as the sexualized object of men's lustful desires (Gould, 1992). One study found a disturbing association between pornography use and sexual aggression, where males showed equal sexual arousal to pornographic rape depictions and consenting intercourse depictions under certain "disinhibiting" circumstances, such as anger or depicted victim pleasure, and these disinhibitions also produced increased laboratory aggression against female targets by males exposed to aggressive pornography (Pollard, 1995). Pollard (1995) further explained that priming (rape depictions) will lead, by spreading activation, to the activation of thoughts that are more general than the specific stimulus. This may clarify the fact that violent pornography may produce heightened (ostensibly) nonsexual
aggression against females in the laboratory. Pollard suggested that these “rape depictions” included components that were likely to lead male viewers to "learn" that rape is reinforcing, in that the assailant typically goes unpunished and the victim is frequently depicted as enjoying the experience. This explicit genre of SEM depicted to participants in Pollard’s (1995) study is part of a wide variety of material accessible to men and women of all ages. Pollard’s study focused on specifically males, and while the results were both intriguing and concerning, the study was incomplete without the inclusion of female participants.

One growing concern is the unmonitored access male adolescents have to SEM, and the possible effects their consumption has on their perceptions of themselves and women, and on their behaviours, such as sexually aggressive behaviours. Focusing directly on violent SEM and its effects on male adolescents, Malamuth and Huppin (2005) found that there were male adolescents who had a higher risk of susceptibility to sexual aggression and concluded that the possession of a certain combination of risk factors in a male adolescent determines how likely he is to be sexually aggressive following pornography exposure. Malamuth and Huppin (2005) also suggested that these higher risk adolescent males are “not only more likely to be exposed to such media, but when they are exposed, they are likely to be changed by such exposure, such as changes in attitudes about the acceptance of violence against women”. The content which was displayed to the participants in this study was specifically violent, inevitably leading to the results of increased sexual aggression. The use of neutral content and mild SEM content may have shown a significant difference in aggression levels. Brown and L'Engle (2009) conducted a longitudinal study of sexual attitudes and behaviours associated with U.S. early adolescents’ exposure to sexually explicit media. Of the 967 male and female participants included in the study, two-thirds (66%) of males and more than one-third (39%) of females had seen at least one form of sexually explicit media in the previous year. The findings revealed that 76 percent of the male participants admitted to committing some form of sexual harassment towards women and using SEM. The results also showed that males who were exposed to SEM during their early adolescence were much more likely to engage in sexual harassment in middle adolescence. It is obvious that the majority of research that has been conducted on the relationship between SEM use and aggression has focused on males—indicating a gap in literature in terms of the relationship between SEM use and aggression among females. This type of research bias may have resulted in establishing a social taboo around SEM use, as it is possible that
most people assume behavioural problems of consumption are more common in males. It is clear that this area requires more attention in order to establish a better understanding of SEM use and the relation with aggression among both males and females. The Buss & Perry aggression questionnaire (1992) is the most common scale used to measure levels of aggression and will be used in this study to investigate the associations between SEM and aggression.

Moral Disengagement and SEM

To date there has been very little direct research on the associations of SEM or pornography use and moral disengagement in psychology. Therefore it is important to first define moral disengagement and the different factors included. Moral disengagement may centre on the cognitive restructuring of inhumane conduct into a benign or worthy one by a number of variations found by Bandura et al (1996). Moral disengagement was divided into eight sub-categories—Moral Justification, detrimental conduct is made personally and socially acceptable by portraying it in the service of valued social or moral purposes. Euphemistic Language thus provides a convenient tool for masking reprehensible activities or even conferring a respectable status upon them. By exploiting Advantageous Comparison with more reprehensible activities, injurious conduct can be rendered benign or made to appear to be of little consequence; the more flagrant the contrasted activities, the more likely it is that one's own injurious conduct will appear trifling or even benevolent. Under Displacement of Responsibility, people view their actions as springing from the social pressures or dictates of others rather than as something for which they are personally responsible. The exercise of moral control is also weakened when personal agency is obscured by Diffusion of Responsibility for detrimental conduct. This is achieved in several ways; responsibility can be diffused by division of labour for a venture with different members performing subdivided aspects that seem harmless in themselves but harmful in its totality, group decision making is another common practice, one that enables otherwise considerate people to behave inhumanely. When everyone is responsible, no one really feels responsible. Group action is still another expedient for weakening moral control. Additional ways of weakening self-deterring reactions operate by Disregarding or Distorting the Consequences of action. When people pursue activities harmful to others for personal gain, or because of social inducements, they avoid facing the harm they cause, or they minimize it. Self-censure for injurious conduct can be disengaged or blunted by Dehumanization that divests people of human qualities or
attributes bestial qualities to them. Once dehumanized, they are no longer viewed as persons with feelings, hopes, and concerns but as subhuman objects. In moral disengagement by Attribution of Blame, people view themselves as faultless victims driven to injurious conduct by forcible provocation, punitive conduct thus becomes a justifiable defensive reaction to instigations, and victims get blamed for bringing suffering on themselves. It is possible that any one of the sub-categories of moral disengagement may be an outcome of SEM use for a number of reasons; the majority of people might only engage in this type of behaviour in a private setting, possibly prompting a person to feel the need to be deceitful in order to avoid feeling ashamed. What is interesting is the possible correlation between a high frequency of SEM use and marriages falling apart (Paul, 2005, Zitzman & Butler, 2009) and also the levels of aggression associated with frequency of SEM use (Brown and L'Engle, 2009; Gould, 1992; Malamuth and Huppin, 2005; Pollard, 1995.). The outcomes and effects found in these studies may display some of the sub-categories of moral disengagement as a part of the behaviours seen with use of SEM (Disregarding or distorting the consequences of action, Diffusion of responsibility, Displacement of responsibility, Advantageous comparison, Euphemistic language, Moral justification, Attribution of Blame, and Dehumanization).

This study will attempt, for the first time, to determine whether SEM has any association with the moral disengagement of a participant. The Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement scale (Bandura et al, 1996) is the most widely applied scale for measuring moral disengagement within people. Originally it was applied to children, but for the purpose of this study, it will be applied to participants from the age of eighteen and above.

**Sexual/Relationship Satisfaction and SEM**

Research investigating the associations between use of SEM and relationship satisfaction reveals contrasting evidence that supports both negative and positive outcomes. One study investigated pornography use within committed relationships, the results of which indicated substantial gender differences in terms of use profiles, as well as pornography’s association with relationship factors. Specifically, male pornography use was negatively associated with both male and female sexual quality. A significantly lower level of sexual quality was found among men, while female pornography use was positively associated with female sexual quality (Poulsen et al, 2013). This could be the case in heterosexual couples in which the female partner knew of and did not approve of
her partner’s pornography use, and subsequently withdrew from the sexual relationship out of repulsion towards their activities. In terms of female pornography use, the findings suggest a slightly positive association with male and female sexual quality and this association was explained by a pattern of using pornography with a partner instead of individually. Thus, couple pornography use—not female pornography by itself—seems to be driving higher sexual quality. One study on SEM use in females conducted by Lawrence and Herold (1988) found that the most frequently given reason for reading erotic novels (alone) was for entertainment. In terms of sex magazines, there were both sexual and nonsexual reasons reported for their use. However, in terms of video content, Lawrence and Herold found that females either engaged with SEM by chance, or with their partner in order to incorporate it into sexual intercourse with their partner (30% of 198 participants). Another comparative study that looked at SEM use and relational satisfaction (Bridges & Morokoff, 2011) revealed that a higher frequency of men’s sexual media use related to negative satisfaction in men, while a higher frequency of women’s sexual media use related to positive satisfaction in male partners. Men reported primarily using sexual media for masturbation, while women reported primarily using sexual media as part of lovemaking with their partners. Shared sexual media use was associated with higher relational satisfaction compared to solitary sexual media use.

In contrast, some studies found no effect of SEM use on relationship satisfaction. Butler et al (2011) divided participants into three experimental groups—groups one and two viewed neutral images (of people and scenery) and group three viewed pornographic images. Participants were then required to answer questions on their relationship and sexual satisfaction. Results indicated that participant responses did not differ among the three groups for either relationship or sexual satisfaction.

Hendricks’ relationship assessment scale (1988) is the most widely used scale in determining relationship satisfaction, and for the purpose of this study, this scale will be employed to determine if there is an association overall between SEM and sexual and relationship satisfaction.

**Aim of the Study and Hypotheses**

The aim of this study is to investigate the associations between the use of Sexually Explicit Material (SEM) and three variables: moral disengagement, aggression and sexual/relationship satisfaction. The objective is to further research the effects of habitual use of Sexually Explicit Material (SEM) among adults from eighteen and above.
There are three main hypotheses that are being proposed for this study.

Hypothesis 1: Those who use SEM will display significantly different levels of aggression, moral disengagement, and sexual/relationship satisfaction compared with those who do not.

Hypothesis 2: The frequency of SEM use will display a significant association with levels of aggression, moral disengagement and sexual/relationship satisfaction.

Hypotheses 3: The type of SEM content engaged with will display a significant association with levels of aggression, moral disengagement and sexual/relationship satisfaction.
METHODOLOGY

Participants

For this study, participants were required to be above the age of 18, and to have access to either some form of social network or an email. An opportunity sample of 267 participants were obtained through various social networks (Facebook and Twitter), through Kwiksursveys.com, and also through direct email. Participants' involvement was entirely voluntary. Out of 267 participants, only 155 completed the survey fully. The sample consisted of males (N=70) and females (N=85) that were aged 18 and above, of all ethnic backgrounds, sexual orientations, religions et cetera. The majority of participants ranged from 18-24 (M= 1.45, SD= .774). Participants obtained were acquaintances of the researcher.

Design

Those who participated in the online survey were prompted with 7 sections/pages. The first section provided informed consent, the second page included measurements of age groups, gender, relationship status, and SEM. The third page included the BPAQ (1992). The fourth page includes the Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement Scale (Bandura et al, 1996). The fifth page included Hendricks’ Relationship Assessment Scale (1988). The last two pages were debriefing and an exit page. The study was a correlational, quantitative, between and within-groups design. The criterion variables were aggression, moral disengagement, and sexual/relationship satisfaction. The predictor variables were gender, age groups, engagement with SEM, type of SEM content used, and the frequency of SEM use. All participants were voluntary based. Inferential statistics were obtained by conducting a frequency and descriptive analysis, chi-square, ANOVA and Independent samples t-tests. Comparisons will be made between gender, age groups, relationship status, those who do and do not use SEM, frequency of SEM use, and type of SEM content used. Descriptive statistics were also obtained using SPSS 20.

Materials

The demographics portion of the survey required participants to select their corresponding age group (18-24, 25-34, 35-44, and 45+). The scoring scale for age groups was 1, 2, 3, and 4. Next, participants were asked to select their gender (gender
scores were 1, 2) and indicate their current relationship status (single, dating, in a relationship, married, divorced, and other; scored 1-6).

The first questionnaire involved measuring SEM (Sexually Explicit Material) use. Firstly, the participants were provided with the definition of what is considered to be SEM and asked whether they use SEM (yes or no; scored as 1 or 0, respectively). Due to the number of studies finding difficulty in defining SEM clearly (Braun-Courville & Rojas, 2009; Brewster & Wylie, 2008; Fisher & Barak, 2001; Peter & Valkenburg, 2009), a revised definition was employed in order to incorporate all material that is considered SEM. The following question required participants to choose the nature of the type of content they use (SEM of a mild nature: materials that show and/or describe nudity or imply sexual activity without explicitly detailing sexual activity, SEM of an explicit nature: materials that explicitly show and/or describe different sexual activities in specific detail with little left to the imagination, both, or if they do not use SEM). The scoring for the types of SEM engaged with were 0 (do not use SEM), 1 (both), 2 (SEM of an explicit nature), and 3 (SEM of a mild nature). The final question asked about the frequency at which participants used SEM in the previous year. A Likert Scale format was used, including five choices (never, rarely (up to a few times a year), occasionally (more than once a month), frequently (more than once a week), and very frequently (more than once a day)). The scoring for the frequency of use of SEM was 0 (never), 1 (rarely), 2 (occasionally), 3 (frequently), and 4 (very frequently). High scores are an indication of high frequency of SEM use.

The second questionnaire used was the Buss & Perry aggression questionnaire (BPAQ, 1992), created to be able to incorporate all ages, gender, and ethnicity. This scale is one of the most widely used psychological instrument for measuring aggression in people. This 29-item scale employed a Likert scale format, which uses a 5 point rating scale that ranges from “extremely uncharacteristic of me” to “extremely characteristic of me.” This scale was designed to measure different sub-categories and the corresponding levels of aggression within each sub-category. Items 1-9 measured physical aggression, 10-14 measured verbal aggression, 15-21 measured anger, and items 22-29 measured hostility. High scores indicate high levels of physical and verbal aggression, anger, and hostility. Two of the items in this scale are reversed scored (question 7 and question 16).

The third questionnaire was Albert Bandura’s Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement scale (1996) which consists of a 32-items (appendix), and is divided into eight sub-categories (Moral Justification, Euphemistic Language, Advantageous
Comparison, Displacement of Responsibility, Diffusion of Responsibility, Disregarding or Distorting the Consequences, Dehumanization, Attribution of Blame). The Likert scale format is used with a 5-point rating scale that ranges from strongly disagree to strongly agree. This scale was originally designed for children, but was used in this study to apply to adults. The scale was designed to measure responses in relation to the various mechanisms of moral disengagement. The following items correspond to the various mechanisms of moral disengagement: Moral justification: 1, 9, 17, 25. Euphemistic language: 2, 10, 18, 26. Advantageous comparison: 3, 11, 19, 27. Displacement of responsibility: 5, 13, 21, 29. Diffusion of responsibility: 4, 12, 20, 28. Distorting consequences: 6, 14, 22, 30. Attribution of blame: 8, 16, 24, 32. Dehumanization: 7, 15, 23, 31. High scores in each sub-category determines high levels in their corresponding mechanism.

The fourth questionnaire used was Hendricks' Relationship Assessment Scale (1988). This scale was originally a 7-item scale, but for the use of this experiment, an extra item was included to measure satisfaction within sexual relationships. A Likert scale format using a 5-point rating scale was used in order to measure satisfaction. The original scale measured from low (1) to high (5). The first two questions' 5-point rating scale ranged from very unsatisfied to very satisfied. Questions 4 and 7 were reverse scored. The higher the score, the more satisfied the respondent was with his/her relationship. The choices for question 3 ranged from poorly, not very well, average, well to extremely well (1 to 5). Question 4 ranged from never, rarely, sometimes, often, and always (1 to 5). Question 5 ranged from hardly at all, somewhat, average, quite a bit, and completely (1 to 5). Question 6 ranged from not much, less than average, average, more than average, and very much (1 to 5). Question 7 ranged from very few, few, average, more than average, and very many (1 to 5). Finally, question 8 ranged from poor, not very good, average, good, and excellent (1 to 5).

All instruments employed in this study were self-employed, online questionnaires. The survey was created with Kwiksurveys.com. A URL was administered to each participant to direct them to the survey. The URL link to Kwiksurveys.com was sent to participants through forums of social media (e.g. Facebook and Twitter), as well as through direct emails. Due to the fact that Kwiksurveys.com was used to create the survey, employees of Kwiksurveys.com also had access to the survey. The survey consisted of four different questionnaires, three of which are published questionnaires while the fourth was designed by the researcher in order to measure SEM use (See
Answers to all questions within the survey were required in order to progress through the survey. The survey consisted of a total of 75 questions and took approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. Informed consent was provided on the introduction page of the online survey for all participants to read (Appendix).

**Procedure**

Having first obtained ethical approval from the PSI, the survey was made available via email, Facebook, and Twitter through Kwiksurveys.com. All participants were voluntary based. Each participant was provided with an informed consent page, displaying that participation was voluntary, and what was being measured in the survey. Confidentiality was assured as no name was required for the survey. Participants were instructed that all questions in the survey were required to be answered in order to finish. A definition of SEM was provided, as well as the type of content being measured, i.e., SEM of a mild and explicit nature. All responses were recorded onto an excel sheet by Kwiksurveys.com.
RESULTS

Statistical analysis was conducted on the data obtained from the variety of tests performed (using SPSS version 20).

Demographics

Overall the findings indicated that out of 155 participants, the majority of participants were females (N=54.8%). Analysis of descriptive statistics shows that the majority of participants were 18 to 24 (N=69.7%), while the rest of the participants made up the other age groups, 25 to 34 (N=19.4%), 35 to 44 (N=7.7%), and 45+ (N=3.2%) (M=1.45, SD=.774). Out of 155 participants, 71 were single (N=45.8%), 5 were dating (N=3.2%), 66 were in a relationship (N=42.6%), 9 were married (N=5.8%), 2 were divorced (N=1.3%), and 2 participants chose other (N=1.3%).

Use of SEM, type, and frequency of use

Table 1 displays participants’ responses to engaging with SEM. A chi-square test revealed that the majority of participants admitted to engaging in SEM (76.8%). Out of 85 females 63.5% reported using SEM, while out of 70 males, 92.9% reported using SEM (see table).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you use SEM?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>65 (92.9%)</td>
<td>54 (63.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>5 (7.1%)</td>
<td>31 (36.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total scores</td>
<td></td>
<td>70 (45.2%)</td>
<td>85 (54.8%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With regard to the types of SEM used, 67 participants engaged with SEM of a mild nature (N=42.9%), 33 engaged with SEM of an explicit nature (N=21.2%), 20 reported using both types (N=12.8%), while a total of 35 participants reported not using SEM (N=22.4%) (Figure 1).
As for the frequency of use of SEM, 6 participants reported never using SEM in the last 12 months (N= 3.9%), 29 said rarely (N= 18.7%), 32 reported occasionally using SEM (N= 20.6%), 38 reported frequent use of SEM (N= 24.5%), while the majority of participants reported very frequently using SEM (N= 32.3%) (Figure 2).

Descriptive statistics on outcome variables

Tables 2, 3, and 4 show the descriptive statistics conducted on all of the outcome variables.
Aggression

Descriptive statistics showed the average mean score for responses to aggression (M= 2.479, SD=.684) with a total mean score for aggression (M= 71.890, SD= 19.848). Table 2 displays the mean scores for each sub-category for aggression, including physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger and hostility of the BPAQ (1999).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical aggression</td>
<td>19.284</td>
<td>7.604</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal aggression</td>
<td>14.845</td>
<td>3.895</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>16.323</td>
<td>6.098</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostility</td>
<td>21.4387</td>
<td>6.570</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>40</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Moral disengagement

Descriptive statistics show the average mean scores for participants responses to moral disengagement (M= 1.978, SD=.441), with a total mean score for moral disengagement (M=63.284, SD= 14.125). Table 3 displays the mean scores for each sub-category of the Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement (Bandura, 1992).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moral Justification</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.878</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Euphemistic language</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.482</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advantageous comparison</td>
<td>6.323</td>
<td>2.192</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Displacement of respons</td>
<td>7.793</td>
<td>2.284</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diffusion of responsibl</td>
<td>9.316</td>
<td>2.962</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distorting of consequences</td>
<td>7.606</td>
<td>2.190</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>7.097</td>
<td>2.082</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dehumanization</td>
<td>6.948</td>
<td>2.672</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sexual/relationship satisfaction

Descriptive statistics revealed the average mean score for responses with sexual/relationship satisfaction (M= 3.143, SD=.854) with a total mean score for sexual/relationship satisfaction (M=25.142, SD= 6.829). Table 5 displays the mean
average scores of the Hendricks’ Relationship Assessment Scale (1988).

Table 5: Descriptive statistics for Sexual/Relationship Satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sexual/relationship satisfaction</td>
<td>25.142</td>
<td>6.829</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Use of SEM measured with outcome variables (Hypothesis 1)

An independent samples t-test was used to investigate the association between participants that do and don't use SEM and the corresponding variables of aggression, moral disengagement and sexual/relationship satisfaction. Descriptive statistics show that the majority of participants reported using SEM (N= 76.8%). Table 6 displays the results.

An independent samples t-test revealed that those who had used SEM displayed significantly higher scores of Moral Justification (M= 10.42, SD= 2.862) than those who did not use SEM (M= 8.611, SD= 2.498) (t (153) = 3.417, p= .001, CI (95%).763 – 2.855). Therefore the null can be rejected.

An independent samples t-test found that those who reported using SEM showed a significant difference of higher scores of Euphemistic Language (M= 8.521, SD= 2.379) than those who reported they did not use SEM (M= 7.139, SD= 2.554) (t (153) = 3.003, p=. .001, CI (95%) = .473 – 2.291). Therefore the null can be rejected.

An independent samples t-test found that those who reported using SEM showed significant difference of higher scores of Advantageous Comparison (M= 6.563, SD= 2.242) than those who reported they did not use SEM (M= 5.528 7, SD= 1.828) (t (153) = 2.526, p = .013, CI (95%) = .226 – 1.845). Therefore the null can be rejected.

An independent samples t-test found that those who reported using SEM showed significant difference of higher scores of Attribution of Blame (M= 7.311, SD= 2.106) than those who reported they did not use SEM (M= 6.389, SD= 1.856) (t(153)= 2.363, p= .019 , CI (95%)= .151 – 1.693). Therefore the null can be rejected.

An independent samples t-test found that those who reported using SEM showed significantly higher scores of Dehumanization (M= 7.193, SD= 2.735) than those who reported they did not use SEM (M= 6.139, SD= 2.307) (t (153) = 2.097, p = .038, CI (95%) = .061 – 2.048). Therefore the null can be rejected.
Table 6: Inferential statistics for use or non-use of SEM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Use SEM</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Sig (two-tailed)</th>
<th>Lower</th>
<th>Upper</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Moral Justification</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>10.420</td>
<td>2.863</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.763</td>
<td>2.855</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>8.611</td>
<td>2.499</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Euphemistic language</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>8.521</td>
<td>2.379</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.473</td>
<td>2.291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>7.138</td>
<td>2.554</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advantageous comparison</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>6.563</td>
<td>2.242</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>.226</td>
<td>1.845</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>5.528</td>
<td>1.828</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attribution of blame</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>7.311</td>
<td>2.106</td>
<td>.019</td>
<td>.151</td>
<td>1.693</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>6.389</td>
<td>1.855</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dehumanization</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>7.193</td>
<td>2.735</td>
<td>.038</td>
<td>.061</td>
<td>2.048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>6.139</td>
<td>2.307</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Non-significant results

An independent samples t-test showed that there was no significant difference between participants who reported using or not using SEM in relation to physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger, hostility, displacement and diffusion of responsibility, distorting of consequences, and sexual/relationship satisfaction.

ANOVA test on frequency and content of SEM use

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to compare the effect of content type and frequency of SEM use on physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger, hostility, moral justification, euphemistic language, advantageous comparison, displacement of responsibility, diffusion of responsibility, distorting of consequences, attribution of blame, dehumanization, and sexual/relationship satisfaction conditions.

Frequency of SEM use with outcome variables (Hypothesis 2)

A one-way analysis of variance showed that moral justification scores differed significantly between the five groups of frequency ($F (4,150) = 2.883, p < .009$). More
specifically Bonferroni post hoc analyses highlighted that the rarely frequent group (M = 8.586, SD = 2.529) had significantly lower moral justification scores than the very frequently group (M = 10.800, SD = 2.878, p = .009). There was no statistically significant difference between rarely frequent and occasionally (p = .569), frequently (p = .299) and with those who never engaged with SEM (p = 1.000) (Table 7).

Table 7: Descriptive statistics for ANOVA with frequency of SEM use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Lower</th>
<th>Upper</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moral justification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>8.5862</td>
<td>2.5286</td>
<td>7.6244</td>
<td>9.5481</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>9.9688</td>
<td>3.0319</td>
<td>8.8756</td>
<td>11.0619</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>10.1053</td>
<td>2.7586</td>
<td>9.1985</td>
<td>11.0120</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very frequently</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>10.8000</td>
<td>2.8784</td>
<td>9.9819</td>
<td>11.6181</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9.6667</td>
<td>2.5819</td>
<td>6.9570</td>
<td>12.3763</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>10.0000</td>
<td>2.8784</td>
<td>9.5433</td>
<td>10.4567</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
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</table>

Multiple comparison

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean dif.</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>Lower</th>
<th>Upper</th>
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<tr>
<td>Moral justification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely -- Never</td>
<td>-1.080</td>
<td>1.260</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>-4.672</td>
<td>2.511</td>
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<tr>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>-1.382</td>
<td>.720</td>
<td>.569</td>
<td>-3.436</td>
<td>.670</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>-1.519</td>
<td>.693</td>
<td>.299</td>
<td>-3.494</td>
<td>.455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very frequently</td>
<td>-2.214</td>
<td>.656</td>
<td>.009*</td>
<td>-4.083</td>
<td>-.345</td>
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ANOVA

<table>
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<th>$F$</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
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<td>Moral justification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.883</td>
<td>.025*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>150</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>154</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Non-significant results

Aggression

A one-way analysis of variance showed that physical aggression scores did not differ significantly between the five groups ($F(4,150) = 1.073, p > .372$).

A one-way analysis of variance showed that verbal aggression scores did not differ significantly between the five groups ($F(4,150) = 1.236, p > .298$). A one-way analysis of variance showed that anger scores did not differ significantly between the five frequency groups ($F(4,150) = 1.436, p > .225$). A one-way analysis of variance showed that hostility scores did not differ significantly between the five frequency groups ($F(4,150) = 1.053, p > .382$). The null was therefore accepted for all of these outcomes.

Moral disengagement

A one-way analysis of variance showed that euphemistic language scores did not differ significantly between the five frequency groups ($F(4,150) = 1.399, p > .237$). A one-way analysis of variance showed that advantageous comparison scores did not differ significantly between the five frequency groups ($F(4,150) = 1.666, p > .161$). A one-way analysis of variance showed that displacement of responsibility scores did not differ significantly between the five frequency groups ($F(4,150) = .770, p > .546$). A one-way analysis of variance showed that diffusion of responsibility scores did not differ significantly between the five frequency groups ($F(4,150) = .771, p > .546$). A one-way analysis of variance showed that distorting of consequences scores did not differ significantly between the five frequency groups ($F(4,150) = 1.410, p > .233$). A one-way analysis of variance showed that attribution of blame scores did not differ significantly between the five frequency groups ($F(4,150) = .557, p > .694$). A one-way analysis of variance showed that dehumanization scores did not differ significantly between the five frequency groups ($F(4,150) = .871, p > .483$). Therefore the null was accepted for all of
these outcomes.

Sexual/relationship satisfaction

A one-way analysis of variance showed that sexual/relationship satisfaction scores did not differ significantly between the five frequency groups \(F(4,150) = 1.181, p > .321\). The null was therefore accepted.

Content type of SEM use on outcome variables (Hypothesis 3)

A one-way analysis of variance showed that moral justification scores differed significantly between the four content type groups \(F(3,151) = 3.843, p < .011\). More specifically Bonferroni post hoc analyses highlighted that the group who don’t use SEM \((M = 8.714, SD = 2.456)\) had significantly lower moral justification scores than group who use SEM of an explicit nature \((M = 10.697, SD = 3.015, p = .024)\) and the group who use SEM of a mild nature \((M = 10.448, SD = 2.814, p = .021)\). There were no statistically significant differences between the group who do not use SEM and the group who use both types of SEM \((p= 1.000)\).

A one-way analysis of variance showed that euphemistic language scores differed significantly between the four content type groups \(F(3,151) = 2.982, p < .033\). More specifically Bonferroni post hoc analyses highlighted that the group who don’t use SEM \((M = 5.571, SD = 1.836)\) had significantly lower euphemistic scores than the group who use SEM of a mild nature \((M = 6.492, SD = 1.949, p = .031)\). There was no statistical difference between the group who do not use SEM and the group that uses both types of SEM \((p= 1.000)\), and the group that uses SEM of an explicit nature \((p= .211)\).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Lower</th>
<th>Upper</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>8.714</td>
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<td>16</td>
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<tr>
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<td>3.015</td>
<td>9.628</td>
<td>11.766</td>
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</tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Both</td>
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<td>9.600</td>
<td>2.963</td>
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<td>10.987</td>
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<td>15</td>
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<td>SEM explicit</td>
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<td>8.485</td>
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<td>67</td>
<td>8.672</td>
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<td>8.156</td>
<td>9.187</td>
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<td>13</td>
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<td>2.758</td>
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### Multiple comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>SE</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>Lower</th>
<th>Upper</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Moral justification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None -- both</td>
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<td>-2.985</td>
<td>1.214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0.680</td>
<td>0.024*</td>
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<td>-0.165</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEM mild</td>
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<td>0.584</td>
<td>0.021*</td>
<td>0.1712</td>
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<table>
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<th>SE</th>
<th>Sig</th>
<th>Lower</th>
<th>Upper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None -- both</td>
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<td>0.211</td>
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<td>0.031*</td>
<td>-2.801</td>
<td>-0.085</td>
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### ANOVA

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<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.843</td>
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<table>
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<th>F</th>
<th>Sig</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Euphemistic language</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.982</td>
<td>.033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>154</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Non-significant results

Aggression
A one-way analysis of variance showed that physical aggression scores did not differ significantly between the four content type groups (F(3,151) = .768, p > .514). A one-way analysis of variance showed that verbal aggression scores did not differ significantly between the four content type groups (F(3,151) = 2.617, p > .053). However this suggests a possible trend for further future research. A one-way analysis of variance showed that anger scores did not differ significantly between the four content type groups (F(3,151) = 1.789, p > .152). A one-way analysis of variance showed that hostility scores did not differ significantly between the four content type groups (F(3,151) = .669, p > .572). Therefore the null was accepted for all of these outcomes.

Moral disengagement
A one-way analysis of variance showed that advantageous comparison scores did not differ significantly between the four content type groups (F(3,151) = 2.554, p > .058). However this suggests a possible trend for further future research. A one-way analysis of variance showed that displacement of responsibility scores did not differ significantly between the four content type groups (F(3,151) = .919, p > .433). A one-way analysis of variance showed that diffusion of responsibility scores did not differ significantly between the four content type groups (F(3,151) = 2.119, p > .100). A one-way analysis of variance showed that distorting of consequences scores did not differ significantly between the four content type groups (F(3,151) = 2.044, p > .110). A one-way analysis of variance showed that attribution of blame scores did not differ significantly between the four content type groups (F(3,151) = 1.543, p > .206). A one-way analysis of variance showed that dehumanization scores did not differ significantly between the four content type groups (F(3,151) = 1.302, p > .276). Therefore the null was accepted for all of these outcomes.

Sexual/relationship satisfaction
A one-way analysis of variance showed that sexual/relationship satisfaction scores did not differ significantly between the four content type groups (F(3,151) = 1.024, p > .384). The null was therefore accepted.
DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to investigate the associations between the use of Sexually Explicit Material (SEM) and three variables: aggression, moral disengagement and sexual/relationship satisfaction. The three hypotheses originally proposed that those who do use SEM, the type of SEM content(s) engaged with, and frequency of SEM use would display a significant association with levels of aggression, moral disengagement, and sexual/relationship satisfaction.

Hypotheses Analysis

The first hypothesis of the current research is that those who use SEM will display a significant difference in levels of aggression, moral disengagement, and sexual/relationship satisfaction. It is important to note the number of men and women who reported using SEM in the last twelve months. Out of a total of 155 participants, 92.9% of men (N=70) and 63.5% (N=85) of females reported using SEM. Which supports the findings of Brown and L’Engle (2009) where two-thirds (66%) of males and more than one-third (39%) of females reported using SEM.

Analyses revealed that there was no significant difference with SEM use and levels of physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger, and hostility (aggression) among participants. In fact across the other two proposed hypotheses, there were no significant associations between frequency and content of SEM use and aggression. The null hypothesis was in all cases, accepted. The results were not consistent with previous research conducted on associations of levels of aggression and use of SEM, frequency of usage, and content engaged with (Gould, 1992; Malamuth and Huppin, 2005; Pollard, 1995; Yang and Youn, 2012). The limitations may be a result of numerous confounding variables, such as low levels of aggression within participants, which the use of SEM may not display any significant difference. Also the possibility of there being some degree of social desirability bias, even though participants were assured of their anonymity. There may even be a certain degree of desensitisation to sexual content, a possible consequence of people consistently being subjected to massive volumes of sexual content, and scenes of violence or aggression. Although the BPAQ (1992) is a very reliable and valid measure, there may be evidence in this study to suggest the possibility of the scale being too transparent. This may be an example of “demand characteristic” among the majority of participants. Also the procedure of administering the survey online may have changed.
participants feeling the necessity to answer the survey quickly, giving them time to think about their answers. However, previous research (Gould, 1992; Malamuth and Huppin, 2005; Pollard, 1995; Yang and Youn, 2012) that measured SEM use and aggression, investigated specific types of people already at risk of being more aggressive, and also some of the materials being displayed were provocative and may be seen as unethical, as they seemed to provoke participants into feeling aggressive. However they employed a direct approach, which may explain the significance of their results. Researchers can further investigate the area of SEM use and aggression by using many different scales of aggression, and possibly a test re-test method to determine levels of aggression, while controlling for any extraneous variables.

Analysis of the results revealed significant differences between SEM use and the corresponding levels of five out of eight mechanisms of moral disengagement. The independent samples t-test analysis showed that moral justification, euphemistic language, advantageous comparison, dehumanizing and attribution of blame scores differed significantly between those who said they did use SEM and those who reported not using SEM in the last twelve months. In this case the null is rejected for these five mechanisms. However, there was no significant difference found among the other mechanisms of moral disengagement (displacement and diffusion of responsibility, and distorting of consequences). In these case the null was accepted. As there hasn’t been any direct previous research in the associations of SEM and moral disengagement, these findings represent an insight into how people cognitively redefine their morals in relation to engaging with SEM. Bandura et al (1996) explained the process of moral justification, where detrimental conduct is made personally and socially acceptable by portraying it as serving socially worthy or moral purposes. People then can act on a moral imperative and preserve their view of themselves as moral agents while inflicting harm on others. An example of this can be seen through soldiers justifying their acts of violence as a just cause. Euphemistic language is widely used to make harmful conduct respectable and to reduce personal responsibility for it. Euphemizing is an injurious weapon. Examples of this are when the military describes bombing missions as "servicing the target," in the likeness of a public utility. Civilians whom the bombs kill are linguistically converted to "collateral damage (Bandura et al, 1996). Advantageous comparison is another way of making harmful conduct look good. By exploiting the contrast principle, reprehensible acts can be made righteous. Terrorists see their behaviour as acts of selfless martyrdom by comparing them with widespread cruelties inflicted on the people with whom they
identify. The more flagrant the contrasting inhumanities, the more likely it is that one's own destructive conduct will appear benevolent (Bandura et al, 1996). Attribution of blame is blaming one's adversaries or circumstances is still another expedient that can serve self-exonerative purposes. In this process, people view themselves as faultless victims driven to injurious conduct by forcible provocation. Punitive conduct is, thus, seen as a justifiable defensive reaction to belligerent provocations. In this case the person who possess this mechanism will claim the victims suffering was brought on themselves (Bandura et al, 1996). Dehumanizing is described as the strength of moral self-censure depends partly on how the perpetrators view the people they mistreat. The joys and suffering of those with whom one identifies are more vicariously arousing than are those of strangers or of individuals who have been divested of human qualities. It is, therefore, difficult to mistreat humanized persons without suffering personal distress and self-condemnation. Self-censure for cruel conduct can be disengaged by stripping people of human qualities. Once dehumanized, they are no longer viewed as persons with feelings, hopes, and concerns but as subhuman objects (Bandura et al, 1996). Bandura et al (1996) had cited a study by Levi (1987) where there was an incident in which a Nazi camp commandant was asked why the Nazis went to such extreme lengths to degrade their victims, whom they were going to kill anyway. The commandant chillingly explained that it was not a matter of purposeless cruelty. Rather, the victims had to be degraded to the level of subhuman objects so that those who operated the gas chambers would be less burdened by distress. The strength of the Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement scale (Bandura et al, 1996) are displayed by the number of significant results that it yielded. Further research is required on SEM use and the associative mechanisms of moral disengagement. As for the non-significant findings, this may be the only weakness of this measure in this study. The limitations of this may be a result of the methods of administering the survey (online), which gave participants time to decide their answers rather than being under a time constraint. It is possible that future research employs a formal and direct approach with participants. To gain a further insight into the impairments of SEM use on our cognitive structuring of morals.

For the purpose of investigating sexual/relationship satisfaction, it was important to acquire participants’ current relationships status, participants were also required to answer the items on Hendricks Relationship Assessment Scale (1988) according to their most recent relationship status. The majority of participants were single (N= 48.8%) and in a relationship (N=42.6%). In testing for any significant association between use,
frequency, and content of SEM and specifically sexual/relationship satisfaction, the null hypothesis was accepted for all three cases. These findings here are consistent with studies conducted on the effects of SEM content by Butler et al (2011) and Bridges and Morokoff (2011). However these findings are not consistent with other studies mentioned Butler et al (2011) (Poulson et al, 2013; Lawrence and Herold, 1988), which saw significant effects of frequency and content of SEM use with heterosexual couples.

Possible limitations within this studies' findings may have resulted from demand characteristics among participants. Also the majority of the participants' were between 18 and 34 (89.1%). This may not be a good enough sample to represent relationships of a longer duration. It is possible the Hendricks Relationship Assessment Scale (1988) is transparent, and easy to comprehend what it is measuring. Also the procedure of administering the survey online may have changed participants feeling the necessity to answer the survey quickly, giving them time to think about their answers. It is also possible that participants may actually be satisfied within their relationships while using SEM with their partner, which was highlighted in Bridges and Morokoffs' (2011) study. Further research in this area is requires more exhaustive investigations to determine the possible associations with SEM use and sexual/relationship satisfaction. As mentioned before, the sample age groups possibly suggest that future research investigate above the age of twenty-eight. This may represent better examples of mature relationships. Possibly an experimental condition is required in order to determine actual levels of satisfaction. Employing a repeated measures design may help to control for extraneous variables, which may help in understanding whether there is an effect between the frequencies, content and overall use of SEM with relationship satisfaction.

The second hypothesis of the current research is that the frequency of SEM use will display a significant association with levels of aggression, moral disengagement and sexual/relationship satisfaction. Analysis of the results from an ANOVA revealed a significant association between frequency of SEM use and one of the mechanisms of moral disengagement, moral justification. Running a Bonferroni post-hoc test results showed there was a significant difference in moral justification scores between those who used it rarely (mean= 8.586) and those who reported very frequently using SEM (mean= 10.800, p= .009). Therefore the null was rejected. However, there was no significant difference found among the other mechanisms of moral disengagement (euphemistic language, advantageous comparison, displacement and diffusion of responsibility, distorting of consequences, attribution of blame, and dehumanization). In
these cases the null was accepted. There can be any number of reasons why only one mechanism displayed a significant association with frequency of SEM use. The measure used maintains a certain amount of ambiguity, which controls for demand characteristics, resulting in participants' answers contributing to the reliability and validity of the measure. However, again the fact that the survey was administered online might have had some effect on the results. It would be beneficial for future research to investigate the frequency of SEM use, especially those who use it very frequently with the mechanisms of moral disengagement. Also employing an appropriate method to test for an association, like a repeated measure experiment, involving more direct face to face administrating of questionnaires.

The third and last hypothesis is that the type of SEM content engaged with will display a significant association with levels of aggression, moral disengagement and sexual/relationship satisfaction. Analysis of the results from an ANOVA revealed significant associations between content type of SEM use and two mechanisms of moral disengagement, moral justification (p= .011) and euphemistic language (p= .033). A bonferroni post-hoc analysis revealed a significant difference in moral justification scores between those who reported not engaging with SEM of any content (mean= 8.714) and those who reported using SEM of a mild nature (mean= 10.448, p= .021) and those who reported using SEM of an explicit nature (mean= 10.697, p= .024). Therefore the null was rejected. The small difference between the mean scores of SEM of a mild and explicit nature, displays that if a participant engages with mild SEM content, they are just as likely as someone who engages with explicit SEM content to develop the mechanism of moral justification. In addition to this, a bonferroni post-hoc analysis revealed a significant difference in euphemistic language scores between those who reported not engaging with SEM of any content (mean= 5.571) and those who reported engaging with SEM of a mild nature (mean= 6.492, p= .031). Therefore the null was rejected. The small difference between the mean scores displays that engagement with any content type of SEM results in developing not only the mechanism of moral justification, but also euphemistic language. However, there was no significant difference found among the other mechanisms of moral disengagement (advantageous comparison, displacement and diffusion of responsibility, distorting of consequences, attribution of blame, and dehumanization). In these cases the null was accepted. As mentioned before the ambiguity of what the items are measuring controls for demand characteristics, resulting in more reliable responses, contributing to the reliability and validity of the measure.
However, again the fact that the survey was administered online might have had some effect on the results. Future researchers can build on these findings by measuring the effects of SEM of a mild and explicit nature and the mechanisms of moral disengagement, to investigate the potential risks of what SEM content depicts, and what implications that has on a persons' cognitive structuring of morals.

Limitations
The main limitations begin with the methods of administrating the survey. Participants' had time to view and answer all the required items from each measure, which possibly displays an emergence of demand characteristics, where participants' will often alter their behaviour to conform to the experimenters expectations. Also there may be some degree of social acceptability bias. An example of this limitation is seen in the kwiksurveys.com count of how many participants started the survey. The number was originally 267 participants, but after exporting the data, only 155 participants were found to have completed the survey. Also the sample consisted of mainly people aged from 18 to 34, and that is a result of the age group this researcher had access to.

Conclusion
To conclude, this study did not find any difference or associations between aggression and sexual/relationship satisfaction and SEM (usage, frequency, and content). However, the main important findings are associated with mechanisms of moral disengagement which hasn't been directly measured against SEM. In relation to use of SEM possible examples of moral justification, euphemistic language, advantageous comparison, attribution of blame, and dehumanizing can be seen in studies by Brown and L'Engle (2009), Gould (1992), Owens et al (2012), Malamuth and Huppin (2005). In the case of all of these examples, participants display examples of mechanisms of moral disengagement. Mainly behavioural examples like sexual harassment, dehumanizing perceptions of women and men, behavioural conduct problems, and delinquent behaviour. All traits that are common in the corresponding mechanisms that were found in this study. What was also an interesting finding is the association with people who reported very frequently using SEM and levels of moral justification, and the difference between those who use it rarely. This suggests a problem with the regularity of usage, which is contrasted in Pollard (1995) and Yang and Youns' (2012) studies where participants' frequency of SEM usage was directly associated with aggressive behavioural outcomes. Another interesting finding is the association between SEM content and the
corresponding mechanisms of moral justification and euphemistic language. The findings show that exposure to SEM and the depictions being viewed effect the cognitive structure of a persons' morals. This is seen in studies by Gould (1992), Pollard (1995), and Yang and Youn (2012). Their results displayed that the type of content viewed has a direct association with aggressive behavioural outcomes, and aggressive perceptions towards other people. It can be seen that people who engage with SEM overall, tend to display mechanisms of moral disengagement, which is a worrying outcome as it suggests some form of moral corruption. These people will commit immoral acts upon others, and justify their actions by any means, confining themselves to their skewed perceptions of other and their morals. Which directly conflict with what society sees as morally acceptable. This is an area that requires immediate attention, and further research.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX 1
Online questionnaire

Page 1
All questions must be answered in order to finish the survey, please answer honestly and accurately. Thank you for your time.

1*
Which of the following age groups do you belong to?
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45+

2*
Are you male or female?
- Male
- Female

3*
What is your current relationship status?
- Single
- Dating
- In a relationship
- Married
- Divorced
- Other

4*
Do you use Sexually Explicit Material (SEM)?
Sexually Explicit Material is defined as content which contains partial or full nudity and sexual behaviors, that is depicted and/or described through magazines, novels, pictures and videos both online and offline and may increase sexual arousal.
- Yes
- No

5*
If you use SEM, is it generally of a mild nature, explicit nature, or both?
SEM of a mild nature includes "materials that show and/or describe nudity or imply sexual activity without explicitly detailing sexual activity."
SEM of an explicit nature includes "materials that explicitly show and/or describe different sexual activities in specific detail with little left to the imagination."
- SEM of a mild nature
- SEM of an explicit nature
- Both
- I do not use SEM
6*
How often have you used Sexually Explicit Material of any nature in the last 12 months?

- Never
- Rarely (up to a few times a year)
- Occasionally (more than once a month)
- Frequently (more than once a week)
- Very frequently (more than once a day)

Page 2
7*
Using the 5 point scale shown below, indicate how uncharacteristic or characteristic each of the following statements is in describing you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Extremely Uncharacteristic</th>
<th>Somewhat Uncharacteristic</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Somewhat Characteristic</th>
<th>Extremely Characteristic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some of my friends think I am a hothead.</td>
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<tr>
<td>If I have to resort to violence to protect my rights, I will.</td>
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<td>When people are especially nice to me, I wonder what they want.</td>
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<td>I tell my friends openly when I disagree with them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I have become so mad that I have broken things.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I can’t help getting into arguments when people disagree with me.</td>
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<td>I wonder why sometimes I feel so bitter about things.</td>
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<td>Once in a while, I can’t control the urge to strike another person.</td>
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<td>Statement</td>
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<tr>
<td>I am an even-tempered person.</td>
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<td>I am suspicious of overly friendly strangers.</td>
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<td>I have threatened people I know.</td>
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<td>I flare up quickly but get over it quickly.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Given enough provocation, I may hit another person.</td>
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<tr>
<td>When people annoy me, I may tell them what I think of them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I am sometimes eaten up with jealousy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I can think of no good reason for ever hitting a person.</td>
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<tr>
<td>At times I feel I have gotten a raw deal out of life.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I have trouble controlling my temper.</td>
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<td>When frustrated, I let my irritation show.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I sometimes feel that people are laughing at me behind my back.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I often find myself disagreeing with people.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
If somebody hits me, I hit back.

I sometimes feel like a powder keg ready to explode.

Other people always seem to get the breaks.

There are people who pushed me so far that we came to blows.

I know that “friends” talk about me behind my back.

My friends say that I’m somewhat argumentative.

Sometimes I fly off the handle for no good reason.

I get into fights a little more than the average person.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is alright to fight to protect your friends.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Slapping and shoving someone is just a way of joking.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Damaging some property is no big deal when you consider that others are beating people up.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
A person in a gang should not be blamed for the trouble the gang causes.

If people are living under bad conditions they cannot be blamed for behaving aggressively.

It is okay to tell small lies because they don't really do any harm.

Some people deserve to be treated like animals.

If people fight and misbehave in college/work it is someone else's fault.

It is alright to beat someone who bad mouths your family.

To hit obnoxious peers/colleagues is just giving them "a lesson."

Stealing some money is not too serious compared to those who steal a lot of money.

A person who only suggests breaking rules should not be blamed if other people go ahead and do it.

If people are not disciplined they should not be blamed for misbehaving.

People do not mind being teased because it shows interest in them.

It is okay to treat badly somebody who behaved like a "worm."

If people are careless where they leave their things it is their own fault if they get stolen.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Option 1</th>
<th>Option 2</th>
<th>Option 3</th>
<th>Option 4</th>
<th>Option 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is alright to fight when your group's honour is threatened.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Taking someone's bicycle without their permission is just &quot;borrowing it.&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>It is okay to insult a peer/colleague because beating him/her is worse.</td>
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<tr>
<td>If a group decides together to do something harmful it is unfair to blame one person in the group for it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>People cannot be blamed for using bad words when all their friends do it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teasing someone does not really hurt them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Someone who is obnoxious does not deserve to be treated like a human being.</td>
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<tr>
<td>People who get mistreated usually do things that deserve it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>It is alright to lie to keep your friends out of trouble.</td>
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<tr>
<td>It is not a bad thing to &quot;get high&quot; once in a while.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Compared to the illegal things people do, taking some things from a store without paying for them is not very serious.</td>
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<tr>
<td>It is unfair to blame one person who had only a small part in the harm caused by a group.</td>
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<tr>
<td>A person cannot be blamed for misbehaving if their friends pressured them to do it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Insults among people do not</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Some people have to be treated roughly because they lack feelings that can be hurt.

A person is not at fault for misbehaving if their parents/peers/colleagues force them too much.

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Page 4

12*
How satisfied are you...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very Satisfied</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Unsatisfied</th>
<th>Very Unsatisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In your sexual relationships?</td>
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<tr>
<td>In your romantic relationships?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

If not currently in a relationship, please answer the following questions based on previous relationships.

13*
How well does your partner meet your needs?
- Poorly
- Not very well
- Average
- Well
- Extremely well

14*
How often do you wish you hadn't gotten into this relationship?
- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

15*
To what extent has your relationship met your original expectations (in a positive way)?
- Hardly at all
- Somewhat
- Average
Quite a bit
Completely

16*
How much do you love your partner?
Not much
Less than average
Average
Above average
Very much

17*
How many problems are there in your relationship?
Very few
Few
Average
More than average
Very many

18*
How good is your relationship compared to most?
Poor
Not very good
Average
Good
Excellent

Page 5
Your response has been recorded.
Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey,
If you have been affected by any of the questions please feel free to contact the following;
Samaritans 1850 60 90 90
Aware 1890 303 302
GROW PHONE: 1890 474 474
If you have any questions regarding this study please feel free to contact me on the
following 1591898@mydbs.ie or my supervisor, Chris.gibbons@dbs.ie.
APPENDIX 2
Informed consent

Associations between use of Sexually Explicit Material (SEM) and moral disengagement, aggression, and sexual/relationship satisfaction.

My name is Niall MacAllister and I am conducting research in the Department of Psychology that explores the associations between the use of Sexually Explicit Material and aggression, moral disengagement, and sexual/relationship satisfaction. This research is being conducted as part of my studies and will be submitted for examination. You are invited to take part in this study and participation involves completing and returning the attached anonymous survey. While the survey asks some questions that might cause some minor negative feelings, it has been used widely in research. If any of the questions do raise difficult feelings for you, contact information for support services are included on the final page. Participation is completely voluntary and so you are not obliged to take part. All participants must be above the age of 18 to take part in this study.

Participation is anonymous and confidential. Thus responses cannot be attributed to any one participant. For this reason, it will not be possible to withdraw from participation after the questionnaire has been collected.

The questionnaires will be securely stored and data from the questionnaires will be transferred from the paper record to electronic format and stored on a password protected computer.

It is important that you understand that by completing and submitting the questionnaire that you are consenting to participate in the study.

Should you require any further information about the research, please contact Niall Macallister. My supervisor can be contacted at Chris Gibbons
Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.