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February 25, 2016

Mr. Richard Plepler, CEO
Home Box Office Inc.
1100 Avenue of the Americas
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Mr. David Benioff, Executive Producer
Mr. D.B. Weiss, Executive Producer
Game of Thrones
9111 Wilshire Boulevard
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Dear Messrs. Plepler, Benioff, and Weiss:

We are writing to express our dismay concerning Home Box Office, Inc.'s, incessant use of pornography and graphic sexual violence in its television programming.

Today, the National Center on Sexual Exploitation (NCOSE) will publicly announce its "2016 Dirty Dozen List," which catalogs top promoters of sexual exploitation and pornography in America. Due to its pernicious and relentless depictions of sex and sexual violence, HBO is being placed on this list. Consequently, HBO now shares a shameful spotlight with the ilk of Backpage.com, one of the biggest facilitators of sexual exploitation in the nation.

Porn culture and pop culture have become synonymous partially as a result of HBO's penchant for intentionally intermixing engaging television programming with pornographic and sexually violent themes. Through the combination of interesting storylines with highly sexualized and violent content, HBO has made a business of turning pornography and pornographic sexual violence into mainstream entertainment. A range of programs on HBO feature sexual content including pornography, prostitution, depictions of rape, incest, orgies, and gratuitous allusions to child sexual abuse. As a case in point, we wish to draw particular attention to *Game of Thrones* (GOT) and its persistent, perverse, and sadistic sexual themes.

Incest

To begin, we note that the entire series of events on which the GOT story hinges is based upon the incestuous relationship of the characters Cersei and Jaime Lannister. While positing an incestuous relationship as the central element of a plot for an entire show no doubt pushes boundaries in television programming, in GOT the normalization of incest appears to be the *raison d'être* of the show. It is not enough through innuendo or

dialogue to convey to the audience that Cersei and Jaime's relationship is incestuous. No! From the first episode the audience is subjected to a sex scene between the sister and brother. For an extra dose of shock, Bran Stark, the young boy who witnesses the scene, is pushed by Jaime from a window in order conceal the sexual nature of his relationship with his sister, and thus the saga begins.

Incest continues to be given lavish obeisance in the GOT narrative:

- 1) Cersei and Jaime have three children as a result of their relationship. These three children are central figures in the story.
- 2) Aerys II Targaryen, the "Mad King" married his sister (both of whom have died before the GOT storyline begins). Three children are the product of this relationship, two of which are central to the plot.
- 3) There are incestuous overtones to the relationship between Viserys Targaryen and his sister Daenerys, as evidenced when Viserys disrobes her and fondles her breasts.
- 4) Cersei also has a sexual relationship with her first cousin, Lancel Lannister.
- 5) Theon Greyjoy unknowingly attempts to seduce his own sister; she, however, is aware they are siblings and allows him to fondle her.
- 6) Craster takes his own daughters as wives. Through these incestuous marriages he sires *many* children—99 of which are sons (the number of daughters is not communicated).
- 7) Jaime rapes his sister in the Sept of Baelor where their dead son's body is laid in repose.

Then there is dialogue like this:

Season 1, Episode 7: You Win or You Die

"The Targaryen's wed brothers and sisters for three hundred years to keep bloodlines pure. Jaime and I are more than brother and sister, we shared a womb, came into this world together, we belong together."

~ Cersei Lannister to Ned Stark

Season 5, Episode 9: Dance of Dragons

"You think I disapprove. Why? Because people disapprove of that sort of thing where you are from. They disapproved of Oberyn and me where you are from; here, no one blinked an eye. A hundred years ago, no one would have blinked an eye at you . . . if you'd been named Targaryen. It's always changing who we are supposed to love and who we're not. The only thing that stays the same is that we want who we want."

~ Ellaria Sand to Jaime Lannister

GOT's hymn to incest raises the question, "Why did HBO decide to adapt *A Song of Ice and Fire* for television in the first place?" Surely any work in which a form of sexual abuse as serious as incest is so unexceptional, is not suitable material for a television series. As has been observed,

“The incest taboo is about as close to a universal law as human moral rules get.”¹ It is not a trope to be used to create shock value, buzz, or hype.

Rape

GOT’s graphic depictions of rape are well-known and have been the subject of much criticism, to which we add our own. Many television shows have depicted rape before, but few can equal the frequency of rape and the dismissiveness of the pain and suffering that rape causes its victims as portrayed in GOT. The narrative surrounding rape in GOT is grounded in popular rape myths—culturally acceptable permission-giving beliefs that justify rape, or which blame victims for their victimization and/or minimize their perceived injury.²

For instance, there is the rape of Daenerys Targaryen. As season 1, episode 1 closes, we see a terrified Daenerys being stripped by the man to whom she was sold into marriage in a political arrangement intended to equip her brother with an army by which he could reclaim the throne. In the following episode viewers encounter a topless and crying Daenerys as she is being raped by her “husband.” A person who is sold into marriage is not a partner in a marriage, but a slave. As such, the scene just described does not depict an exchange of sex between husband and wife, or mutually consenting partners, but rape. Of course, rather than experiencing trauma from this horrific event, in true fairytale fashion, Daenerys falls in love with her rapist. These events exemplify the popular rape myths that husbands cannot rape their wives and that women secretly enjoy rape.

There is also the infamous rape of Cersei Lannister by her brother Jaime which occurs at the altar on which their dead son’s body is laid. One commentator exclaimed, “. . . it may be the most screwed up sex scene ever broadcast on television.”³ Indeed. Not only is Cersei and Jaime’s relationship incestuous, not only does the scene take on shades of necrophilia as their dead son’s body is only inches away, but on top of these obscenities, Jaime forces himself on Cersei over her repeated protests. It appears that the producers of GOT are firm believers in the rape myth that “No!” means “Yes!” And, in the aftermath of this experience Cersei displays no indications of emotional upset or distress, thus epitomizing the rape myth that women should not dwell on rape, but “forget it” and move on. We are familiar with the director’s defense that the sex “becomes consensual by the end.”⁴ Not surprisingly, this reaffirms the aforementioned rape myth that women secretly enjoy rape.

¹ Hal Herzog, “The Problem with Incest: Evolution, Morality, and the Politics of Abortion,” *Psychology Today*, October 11, 2012, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/animals-and-us/201210/the-problem-incest> (accessed February 20, 2016).

² Monto and Norma Hotaling, “Predictors of Rape Myth Acceptance among Male Clients of Female Street Prostitutes,” *Violence against Women* 7, no. 3 (March 2011): 275-293.

³ Marlow Stern, “Game of Thrones’ Most WTF Sex Scene: Nikolaj Coster-Waldau on Jaime Lannister’s Darkest Hour,” *The Daily Beast*, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/04/20/game-of-thrones-most-wtf-sex-scene-nikolaj-coster-waldau-on-jaime-lannister-s-darkest-hour.html> (accessed February 18, 2016).

⁴ Andrew Romano, “Why We Should Pretend the ‘Game of Thrones’ Rape Scene Never Happened,” *The Daily Beast*, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/05/04/why-we-should-pretend-the-game-of-thrones-rape-scene-never-happened.html> (accessed February 18, 2016).

Add to this list, the wedding night rape of Sansa Stark by Ramsey Snow. It was yet another gratuitous, sickening scene of sexual violence—the shock value of which GOT producers magnified by Ramsey’s insistence that Theon (Reek) Greyjoy stay to witness Ramsey’s violation of the girl Theon had known from childhood. Sansa had already been subjected to a graphically depicted, attempted gang rape, and was publicly humiliated when King Joffrey had her beaten and publicly stripped. Gladly, Sansa was rescued before Joffrey could finish his spectacle but, upon being escorted away and asked if she wanted to end her engagement to King Joffrey she responds, “I am loyal to King Joffrey, my one true love.” Again, we find one of GOT’s favorite leitmotifs: women love the men who subject them to sexual violation and humiliation.

GOT is also rich in dialogue in which women are discussed as mere fodder for male sexual conquest. For instance:

Season 1, Episode 1: Winter is Coming

“We go home with an army, with Khal Drogo’s army. I would let his whole tribe f*** you, all 40,000 men and their horses too, if that’s what it took.”

~Viserys Targaryen to his sister, Daenerys

Season 2, Episode 4: The Night Lands

Salladhor Saan: “One thing, I want the Queen. Cersei. I want her. I’ll sail with your fleet, all 50 of my ships, and if we don’t drowned at the bottom of Blackwater Bay, I will f*** this blonde queen, and I will f*** your [unintelligible].”

Matthos Seaworth: “This war isn’t about you. We’re not attacking King’s Landing so that you can rape the queen.”

Salladhor Saan: “I’m not going to rape her, I’m going to f*** her.”

Matthos Seaworth: “As if she would just let you.”

Salladhor Saan: “You don’t know how persuasive I am. I never tried to f*** you.”

Season 3, Episode 8: “Second Sons”

“I swear I f***ed you once in a pleasure house in Lys.”

“Why? I didn’t mind hers. She licked my a** like she was born to do it.”

“Take your clothes off and come and sit on Mero’s lap that I may give you Second Sons.”

“Show me your c***. I want to see if it’s worth fighting for.”

“In the Second Sons we share everything, after the battle maybe we’ll share you.”

~Mero, in a series of statements to Daenerys

Prostitution

Brothels also abound in GOT, suppling the perfect backdrop for scene after scene of nudity, sex, and exploitation. From parades of naked women on display for sexual sale, to the setting of casual

dialogues, political intrigues, and orgies, brothels and the naked women in them are the wallpaper of GOT.

Beyond the routine buying and selling of women, some of whom look like mere teenagers, the prostituted women in GOT are subjected to sadistic violence and murder. As with other women, sexual violence perpetrated against prostituted women is justified by specific prostitution myths such as prostitutes are unrapable, no harm is done to prostitutes when they are assaulted or harassed, prostitutes deserve to be raped, and all prostitutes are the same.⁵ Such myths give assent to the notions that “male sexual needs are imperative, and that prostitution should exist as an institution to meet men’s sexual needs.”⁶

These prostitution myths are also played out in GOT. For instance, following the dialogue below, Tyrion arranges a “gift” for King Joffrey of two prostituted women (after all, women, especially prostituted women, are just sexual appliances to be used to meet male sexual needs).

Season 2, Episode 4: Garden of Bones

Bronn: “The little king’s backed up. Clogged from balls to brains.”

Tyrion: “You think dipping his wick will cure what ails him?”

Bronn: “There’s no cure for being a c***. But the boy’s at that age, and he’s got nothing to do all day but pick wings off flies. It couldn’t hurt to get some of the poison out.”

Upon finding the two women, Ros and Daisy, supplied by Tyrion in his room, Joffrey proceeds to aim a crossbow at Ros and force her to brutally bludgeon Daisy with his scepter.

Later, Ros’ purpose in the world—as a privately-owned but publically-traded sexual commodity—is made perfectly clear to her by her pimp Petyr Baelish. At a moment when Ros disgruntles a sex buyer because she is overwrought with grief at the murder of another prostituted woman’s baby, Baelish speaks to her. Dialogue that begins with a hint of compassion, but is delivered with a tone of seduction, quickly turns as hard and cold as stone:

Season 2, Episode 4: The Night Lands

“You know you remind me of another girl, a lovely thing I once acquired from a Lysene pleasure house. Beautiful, like yourself; and intelligent, like yourself. But she wasn’t happy. She cried, often. I asked her why, but we didn’t have the kind of rapport that you and I have. Yes, it was quite sad. Girls from Lysene pleasure houses are expensive, extremely expensive. And this one wasn’t making me any money. I hate bad investments. Really I do. They haunt me. I had no idea how to make her happy, no idea how to mitigate my losses. I had a very wealthy patron. He offered me a tremendous amount of money to let him transform this lovely, sad girl; to use her in ways that never occurred to most men,

⁵ Ann Cotton, Melissa Farley, and Robert Baron, “Attitudes toward Prostitution and Acceptance of Rape Myths,” *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 32, no 9 (2002): 1790-1796.

⁶ *Ibid.*

and you know what occurs to most men. I would not say he succeeded in making her happy, but my losses were definitely mitigated. Take tonight off, to mourn Mhaegen's child. I'll see you tomorrow and you'll be happy. That makes me happy."

Baelish's icy threat to handover Ros to someone who will abuse her ultimately becomes reality when he provides Ros to King Joffrey to do with as he pleased. For Joffrey, that meant stringing Ros up on his bed and killing her by shooting her multiple times with bolts from his crossbow, the grisly aftermath of which GOT shares with its viewers.

Child Abuse and Sexual Exploitation

Given that there is no area of sexual exploitation that GOT is not happy to accommodate, it comes as no surprise that the show even includes scenes of child abuse and sexual exploitation. A noteworthy example occurs in season 5, episode 9, "Dance of Dragons," when Arya Stark witnesses Meryn Trant's visit to a Braavosi brothel. During his negotiations with the madam, she presents him with three different young women or girls, and each time he responds, "Too old." Finally, the frustrated madam presents him with a young serving girl who he looks over and declares, "Good." As he walks off with this young prize, he informs rather than requests the madam to, "... have a fresh one for me tomorrow," to which she readily replies, "Of course."

Not finished with his exploitation of girls, in the following episode, "Mother's Mercy," GOT viewers are witnesses to a scene in which Trant is viciously striking three young girls he has assembled in a line in a room. Two of the girls are terrified and cry out in pain from the blows, but the third remains silent. Trant allows the two girls who cried to leave, but makes the other stay so that he can focus his full fury on her. The scene quickly turns into one of GOT's infamous bloodbaths. The girl is revealed to be Arya Stark, who attacks and kills Trant by stabbing him in both eyes and his chest several times, ultimately slitting his throat.

Further, gratuitous dialogue, such as the examples below, normalizes not only child rape and child sexual slavery, but also acrotomophilia and necrophilia.

Season 1, Episode 5: The Wolf and the Lion

Petyr Baelish: "You look a bit lonely today. You should pay a visit to my brothel this evening; first boy is on the house."

Lord Varys: "I think you are mistaking business with pleasure."

Baelish: "Am I? All those birds that whisper in your ear, such pretty little things. Trust me, we accommodate all inclinations."

Varys: "Oh, I'm sure. Lord Redwyne likes his boys very young, I hear."

Baelish: "I'm a purveyor of beauty and discretion, both equally important."

Varys: “Though I suppose beauty is a subjective quality, no? Is it true that Sir Marlin of Tumblestone prefers amputees?”

Baelish: “All desires are valid to a man with a full purse.”

Varys: “And I heard the most awful rumor about a certain lord with a taste for fresh cadavers. Must be enormously difficult to accommodate that inclination. The logistics alone . . . to find beautiful corpses before they rot.”

Baelish: “Strictly speaking such a thing would not be in accordance with the King’s laws.”

Varys: “Strictly speaking.”

Season 2, Episode 4: The Night Lands

“Come closer and I’ll shove that stick up your bunghole and f*** you bloody!”
~Rorge to Arya Stark disguised as a boy.

Given the extent and serious harms of child sexual abuse, it is imperative for HBO/GOT to stop presenting the issue in ways that are needlessly violent and which give a platform to abuse. Research suggests that “1 in 4 girls and 1 in 7 boys will be the victim of some type of sexual abuse or assault before the age of 18. With 75 million children in the United States, this translates to almost 15 million children who will be sexually victimized and abused over the next 18 years.”⁷ This means that child sexual abuse is 1.7 times more common than obesity (which impacts approximately 9 million children over the age of 6), 75 times more common than pediatric cancer, and 167 times more common than autism in children.⁸ A meta-analysis of 37 studies provides compelling evidence that child sexual abuse is “profoundly traumatizing,” with negative impacts on human development, such as the development of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, suicide, sexual promiscuity, victim-perpetrator cycle, and poor academic performance—regardless of victim age, gender, or socioeconomic status.⁹

Sexual Humiliation, Torture, and Murder

Torture of many sorts is a staple feature of GOT: flaying, rat torture, fingernail extraction, dismemberment, mutilation, etc. But in GOT, even torture is material for sexualization. There is, for example, the aforementioned sadistic murder of the prostituted character Ros at the hand of Joffrey. In addition, there is the castration of Theon Greyjoy. As prisoner of Ramsey Snow, Theon was already the subject of Ramsey’s malevolent and gruesome torments. There could be no doubt as to Ramsey’s capacity and thirst for cruelty.

⁷ National Coalition to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation. *The Health Impact on Children & Youth*. http://www.preventtogether.org/Resources/Documents/Health_Impact_on_Youth.pdf (accessed February 22, 2016).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Elizabeth Oddone Paolucci, Mark L. Genuis, and Claudio Violato, “A Meta-Analysis of the Published Research on the Effects of Child Sexual Abuse,” *The Journal of Psychology* 135, no. 1 (2001): 17-36.

Nevertheless, GOT created a scenario in which, on Ramsey's orders, characters known as Violet and Miranda are sent to unbound and sexually arouse Theon. As the sex scene ensues, Ramsey suddenly breaks in with his men, knife in hand, and makes it clear that Theon is about to be castrated. When GOT viewers next see Theon, he is once again bound and in agony, while nearby Ramsey symbolically eats a large sausage; viewers later learn that Ramsey has had Theon's genitals delivered to his parents.

In season 4, episode 2, "The Lion and the Rose," Ramsey and his accomplice Miranda literally hunt down a girl named Tansy, while having her chased by dogs. As the terror-stricken girl runs, Miranda shoots her with her bow and arrow, piercing Tansy through her thigh. They come upon the girl writhing in agony; as a reward for their work, Ramsey turns his dogs loose on her to savagely rip her to pieces. Theon, now Ramsey's drudge and slave, is kept at hand to witness the carnage.

In one of GOT's more renowned scenes of gore and mayhem—popularly referred to as the "Red Wedding"—those of the Stark clan attending the wedding of Edmure Tully and Roslin Frey are massacred shortly after the wedding concludes. While most of those slaughtered were shot with crossbows or had their throats cut, the murder of Talisa Stark was unique in its nature and brutality. Out of the myriad of ways that Talisa could have been murdered, GOT chose to show Lothar Frey repeatedly stabbing her in the low abdomen, ostensibly to ensure that both Talisa and the child in her womb are killed. Given that Talisa was in the early stages of her pregnancy, there would have been no chance for the child to survive the death of its mother. Thus, the savage stabbing of Talisa in her womb was not only gratuitous, but a grotesque sexualized murder—she was killed in a way specific to her capacity as a woman to bear children.

To the long list of GOT's sexual depravities, we include Cersei's so-called "Walk of Atonement," a public ritual of punishment occurring in the finale of GOT's season 5. Having confessed to incest with her first cousin, Lancel Lannister, Cersei is brought to a cell where she is stripped naked and roughly washed. Her hair then shorn, she is forced to walk naked through the streets of Kings Landing, while a Septa rings a bell and relentlessly calls out "Shame!" The crowd assembled in the streets throw refuse and excrement at Cersei; spit on her; call her c***, whore, brother***er, and bitch; men and women rush at her, exposing themselves to her.

Some have argued that GOT "nailed this scene" because it exposed "misogynist intentions of the High Sparrow who sentences her."¹⁰ We think not. If GOT wanted to portray such a scene in a way that was purely intended to expose misogyny, was it necessary to provide the spectacle of a fully naked, humiliated, traumatized Cersei (played by Lena Headey) for more than five minutes? We note that when the High Septon (played by Paul Bentley) was subjected to his "Walk of Atonement" there was no public proclamation whereby crowds could assemble to see his abasement, no trash or excrement thrown his way, no obscene words hurled at him, viewers

¹⁰ Amanda Marcotte, "Cersei's Walk of Shame and Game of Thrones' Evolution on Sexual Violence," *Slate*, June 15, 2015, http://www.slate.com/blogs/xx_factor/2015/06/15/game_of_thrones_has_been_critiqued_for_its_portrayal_of_sexual_violence.html (accessed February 23, 2016).

never saw his genitalia, and the scene was barely one minute long. We do not welcome the sexual humiliation of the High Septon, or that of any character in GOT, but we note that GOT saved its deluxe version of sexual humiliation for a female character, played by a beautiful woman. Beyond this, it was a very real Lena Headey who stood naked and shorn before a crowd of jeering onlookers; in this, the scene crossed over the line from fiction to reality.

Closing

In summary, HBO's *Game of Thrones* is brimming with pornographic sex scenes, awash in misogynistic dialogue, and bloated with depictions of sexual violence and torture so savage as to be unrivaled in television history. In *Game of Thrones*, HBO has given a stage to an amalgam of pornography, rape, prostitution, child abuse, sexual violence, sexual paraphilias, and wholesale carnage that succeeds in bringing the ambiance of torture pornography to the American living room.

In an age when our society is struggling to cope with serious child and adult sexual exploitation,¹¹ racially-motivated, sexual violence,¹⁴ an epidemic of sexual assault on college and university campuses,¹⁵ and rife human trafficking of persons for purposes of commercial sexual exploitation,¹⁶ serial depictions of pornography and raw sexual violence only serve to exacerbate deeply entrenched social ills that have devastating impacts at the individual and societal level.

Research has shown that, "exposure to scenes from R-rated movies that contain sexual content and also present women in an objectified or degrading way have the effect of altering the way men perceive the account of an acquaintance rape, lessening males' perception of the victim's suffering."¹⁷ Please note that viewing explicit sexual intercourse is *not* necessary to achieve these effects.¹⁸

¹¹ Bryce Covert, "Women in Baltimore Public Housing Were Forced to Trade Sex for Basic Repairs." *Think Progress* (Jan 9, 2016), <http://thinkprogress.org/economy/2016/01/09/3737612/baltimore-housing-sex-settlement/> (accessed January 9, 2016); U.S. Department of Justice. "The National Strategy for Child Exploitation Prevention and Interdiction: A Report to Congress, (August 2010), <http://www.justice.gov/psc/docs/natstrategyreport.pdf> (accessed January 14, 2016).

¹⁴ Victoria Olive, "Sexual Assault against Women of Color." *Journal of Student Research* 1 (2012): 1-19; Gabby Bess, "Notre Dame Tutor Accused of Forcing Student into 'Racially Motivated' Sex." *Broadly*, (November 2, 2015), https://broadly.vice.com/en_us/article/notre-dame-tutor-accused-of-forcing-student-into-racially-motivated-sex (accessed January 14, 2016); Donna M. Hughes, "'Welcome to Rape Camp' Sexual Exploitation and the Internet in Cambodia." *Journal of Sexual Aggression* 6, no. 1/2 (2000):1-23, <http://www.uri.edu/artsci/wms/hughes/rapecamp.htm> (accessed January 14, 2016).

¹⁵ The White House Council on Women and Girls. *Rape and Sexual Assault: A Renewed Call to Action*, (2014), https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/sexual_assault_report_1-21-14.pdf (accessed January 9, 2016).

¹⁶ Polaris. *2014 Statistics*, <https://polarisproject.org/sites/default/files/2014Statistics.pdf> (accessed January 9, 2016).

¹⁷ Michael A. Milburn, Roxanne Mather, and Sheree D. Conrad, "The Effects of Viewing R-rated Movie Scenes That Objectify Women on Perceptions of Date Rape," *Sex Roles* 43, no. 9/10 (2000): 645-664.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Furthermore, the consequences of viewing pornography only compound such attitudes. For instance, sexual violence against women, including sexual harassment and rape, are correlated to the consumption of pornography. A recent meta-analysis of 22 studies from seven countries provides clear evidence confirming that pornography exposure is associated with sexual aggression in the United States and internationally, among both males and females; associations are stronger for verbal than physical sexual aggression, but both are significant.¹⁹ As the authors state, “the accumulated data leave little doubt that, on the average, individuals who consume pornography more frequently are more likely to hold attitudes conducive to sexual aggression and engage in actual acts of sexual aggression than individuals who do not consume pornography or who consume pornography less frequently.”²⁰

A separate meta-analysis of 46 studies demonstrated that pornography contributes to the development of sexually dysfunctional attitudes and behaviors including:

- 1) developing sexually deviant tendencies;
- 2) committing sexual offenses;
- 3) experiencing difficulties in intimate relationships; and
- 4) accepting rape myths.²¹

Fraternity men who consume *mainstream* pornography express a greater intent to commit rape; those who consume *sadomasochistic* pornography express significantly less willingness to intervene in situations of sexual violence, greater beliefs in rape myths, and greater intent to commit rape; and, among those who consume *rape-themed* pornography, the researchers described “serious effects” including less bystander willingness to intervene, greater belief in rape myths, and greater intent to commit rape.²² In other words, there was *no* type of pornography that did not result in a greater intent to commit rape. From this small sampling of a rich body of research, it is clear that pornography, much less brutal depictions of sexual violence, is not benign entertainment.

Thus, sexual violence is not a topic for HBO/GOT to exploit for mere shock value or titillation. Nor is its unremitting theme in the show an issue that HBO can whitewash with claims of artistic license or historical conformity. Sexual violence is a real social harm, with real (not fictional) victims, who bear the scars of their abuse for their entire lives. By the excessiveness to which sexual violence is an element of the GOT plot—the graphic depictions of incestuous sex, rape, prostitution, child sexual abuse, and sexual torture, and dialogue which portrays abuses like incest as simply a matter

¹⁹ Paul J. Wright, Robert S. Tokunaga, and Ashley Kraus. “A Meta-Analysis of Pornography Consumption and Actual Acts of Sexual Aggression in General Population Studies.” *Journal of Communication*, (December 29, 2015): 1-23.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Elizabeth Paolucci-Oddone, Mark Genuis, and Claudio Violato, “A Meta-Analysis of the Published Research on the Effects of Pornography. In C. Violato, E. Paolucci-Oddone, & M. Genius (Eds). *The Changing Family and Child Development* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing), 2000: 48-59.

²² John Foubert, Matt Brosi, and R. Bannon, “Pornography Viewing among Fraternity Men: Effects on Bystander Intervention, Rape Myth Acceptance & Behavioral Intent to Commit Sexual Assault, *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*, 18, no. 4 (2011): 212-231.

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of love or taste—GOT anesthetizes its viewers to heinous sexual abuses and exploitation.

Would HBO present the horrors of the transatlantic slave trade or the Jewish Holocaust in ways that failed to humanize and preserve the dignity its victims? Given HBO's track record, the answer to this question is uncertain. However, we hope that even HBO can see that depicting horrific crimes against people groups like Africans and Jews, necessitates a sensitivity and care that is *conspicuously* absent in GOT's handling of issues of rape, sexual abuse, and violence.

As we recall Cersei's "Walk of Atonement," we remember the ringing of the bell and the refrain of "Shame!" Shame indeed. The shame is on HBO—for stooping to spew unprecedented levels of sexual depravity and violence into homes across America and around the world for ratings and for profit. Truly, *Game of Thrones* should be more aptly named *Shame of Thrones*.

While we have not presented a complete catalogue of the sexual violence and perversion depicted in GOT, it is also not a complete picture of HBO's other pornographic, sexually exploitive and violent content. The list includes shows such as *Real Sex*, *Cathouse: The Series*, *Tell Me You Love Me*, *True Blood*, *Hung*, and *Boardwalk Empire*, to mention a few. The Walk of Atonement for HBO will be a long one.

We exhort HBO to become a responsible actor on these issues by acknowledging the harm of pornography and graphic depictions of sexual violence. We call on HBO to stop producing and distributing pornography and to work towards meaningful programming, that when a plot must address sexual violence, it does so in non-objectifying and non-normalizing ways.

All girls, boys, women, and men have a natural human dignity and thus a right to live lives free from sexual exploitation. All pornography and sexual violence is degrading, dehumanizing, exploitive, and a violation of this right. Pornography and graphic sexual violence is an attack on human dignity, identity, and worth, and has no place in the public square, much less on the living room television.

Our nation is now suffering from an emerging public health crisis fueled by the widespread distribution of pornography. Home Box Office, Inc., bears a great burden of responsibility for this crisis. Accordingly, we request to meet with you and your representatives to discuss the matter of ceasing its distribution of pornography, as well as reform of its television programming.

Sincerely,



Patrick A. Trueman
President & CEO

Dawn Hawkins
Senior Vice President & Executive Director

cc: Quentin Schaffer, Executive Vice President of Communications
Jeff Cusson, Senior Vice President of Corporate Communications
Keith Cocozza, Senior Vice President of Corporate Communications

Messrs. Plepler, Benioff, and Weiss

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Susan Ennis, Executive Vice President, Programming Planning and Strategy

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