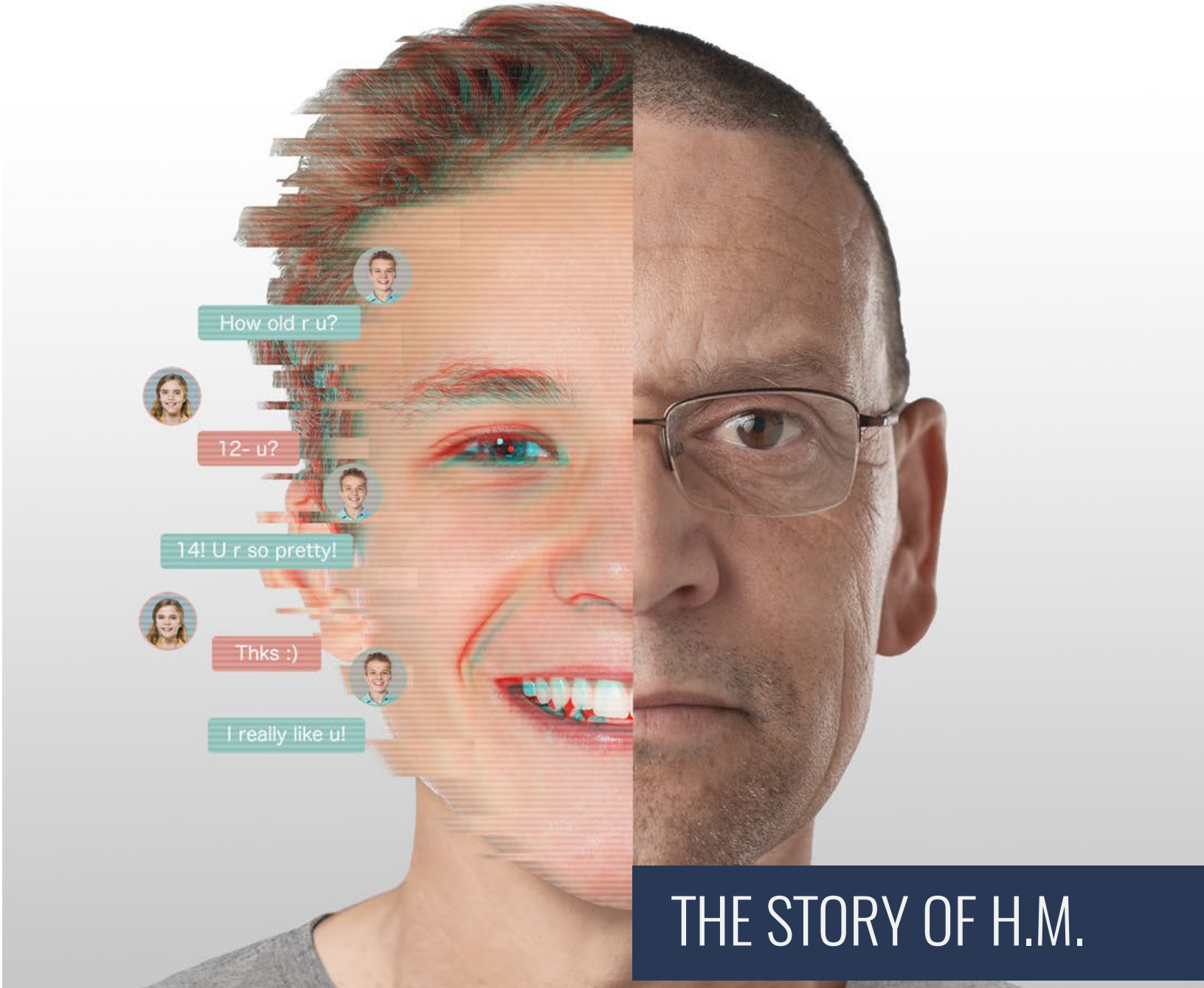
ANY KID ONLINE. ANY TIME. ANYWHERE.



THE STORY OF H.M.

SEXTORTION

the hidden pandemic

The Story of S.M.

Link to Video Here Length: 5 minutes

Learning Objective

Students will be able to explain the ways S.M. was vulnerable to exploitation and how she was manipulated by her extorter, then evaluate the psychological effects of the exporter's actions.

Discussion Questions

Potential Answers

In what ways does S.M. describe herself as feeling insecure and like she did not "fit in" as a preteen?	1	*She played sports and was tall so was considered more masculine than other girls. She didn't believe she was beautiful.*
S.M. says of the chatrooms: "All eyes on you, that's awesome, in a 13-year old's mind." What social and emotional need was being filled for S.M. by these chat rooms? Can you identify with her?	2	*It filled the human needs that we all have for attention, to feel loved, to feel friendship and to build her self-esteem.*
S.M. says that she was addicted to the chatroom and had to go back after taking a break from them. What elements of this feeling of being addicted to being online may make someone more susceptible to being victimized online?	3	*Someone who is online all the time may be seeking and getting attention online only- hearing that they are beautiful online only- they may be talking to more people they've never met offline which can be riskier than interacting with people you know face-to-face. Someone who feels addicted to being online may seek out more and more: more people to talk to and more interactions that feel more "exciting" and are potentially more dangerous.*
What are the ways the extorter continued to manipulate S.M.? What kept her talking to him?	4	*The extorter used a fake identity, using a fake picture of someone S.M. thought was attractive and built a relationship with her such that she felt like she was in love with him. Later, he threatened her and her family and sent her pictures of where her home was and personal information about her family.*

Discussion Questions

Potential Answers

5

What do you think the psychological effects of S.M.'s extorter having information about her family and home were? What do you think she may have done had the extorter not had this information?

It was very scary and traumatic. It triggered her instinct to protect her family at all costs and is what enabled the extortion to continue for 2 years. If the extorter hadn't had this information, she might have been more able to stop sending images after that first image, may have been able to more easily tell a trusted adult what was happening, or report to the police.

6

S.M. felt like it was up to her to protect her family since she is the one who sent the image- what were her other options? What do you think you would have done?

It's understandable that someone in S.M.'s position would want to try to control the situation themselves, especially given how scary the threats were and how S.M. felt like the situation was her fault. It is important to think now about who you could go to if you or a friend were to get into a similar situation. Conversations like we are having today are very important for getting both young people and adults ready to talk about sextortion should it ever happen to someone we know. Important things to do if you are ever sextorted are to tell a trusted adult as soon as possible, report the incident to the site or app where it is happening, report it to the CyberTipline, and report it to police.

7

Describe the physical and emotional/ psychological effects of sextortion that S.M. discussed. Can you think of other effects this trauma could have on someone?

She described cutting herself/engaging in self-harm, getting on camera naked for the extorter, and feeling like her life was outside of her own control. Other potential effects of this trauma include feelings of depression, anxiety, weight-changes, withdrawing from friends, among others.

8

What is the main takeaway for you personally after seeing the story of S.M.? Do you mind sharing with a group?

9

What societal changes could young people lead the charge on which might reduce the number of people being sextorted?

Young people could start making it more normal to talk about sex and sexuality with each other and with the adults around them. When we don't talk about something, it makes it taboo, and often that makes something dangerous. Young people could take a stand against forwarding or other non-consensual sharing of explicit images and create a culture where people are not harassed if these types of images are leaked or spread. Young people could help raise awareness about sextortion; the tactics and red flags to watch out for, and what to do if it happens to you or someone you know.

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