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The Harmful Effects of Pornography

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INTRODUCTION

We should first, as the Jesuits say, define our terms. The word "pornography" comes from the Greek words, "porne," meaning a harlot, prostitute, or whore, and "graphos," meaning a writing or depiction. If we put both words together we arrive at "A depiction or description of the activities of whores." Webster elaborates to indicate that it also means "A depiction of licentiousness or lewdness," or "A portrayal of erotic behavior designed to cause sexual excitement."[\[1\]](#)

There are two generally recognized forms of pornography, one with the label "soft-core" and the other "hard-core." In the United States, the Supreme Court has equated hard-core pornography with Obscenity. Anything else may loosely be called "indecent" material, or soft-core porn.

HARMS FROM PORN

1. The Harm to Your Soul

We, of course, recognize that the consumption of pornography or the participation in its production and distribution has always been regarded as sinful and thus harmful to the soul and our eternal salvation. This has been the universal teaching of the Catholic Church. The [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#) (paragraph 2354) says:

"Pornography consists in removing real or simulated acts from the intimacy of the partners, in order to display them deliberately to third parties. It offends against chastity because it perverts the conjugal act, the intimate giving of spouses to each other. It does grave injury to the dignity of its participants (actors, vendors, the public), since each one becomes an object of base pleasure and illicit profit for others. It immerses all who are involved in the illusion of a fantasy world. It is a grave offense."[\[2\]](#)

Those who are not of the Catholic faith can refer to St. Matthew's Gospel (5:28) where the Evangelist says:

"Everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery in his heart."

For adherents to the Muslim religion, we have the words of the Qu'ran:

"God desires to turn toward you, but those who follow their lusts desire you to swerve away mightily." [Sura IV (On Women), v. 32]

"Say to the Believers, that they cast down their eyes and guard their private parts; that it is purer for them; God is aware of the things they work.

"And say to the believing women, that they cast down their eyes and guard their private parts, and reveal not their adornment save such as is outward; and let them cast their veils over their bosoms, and not reveal their adornment save to their husbands . . ." [Sura XXIV (On Light), vv. 30, 31; from Arberry, A.J., The Koran Interpreted, New York: Touchstone, 1996]

There is also this Hadith, or traditional saying of the Prophet Muhammad:

"To every religion there is a character and the character of Islam is chastity."

Anyone in the Jewish tradition will remember that a core belief in Judaism is that man and woman are created in the image of God and deserve to be treated with respect and dignity. Judaism sanctions, indeed hallows, the positive enjoyment of sexuality within the context of an overall relationship between husband and wife. Pornography represents the very antithesis of that tradition. It makes people into objects by reducing sexuality to an impersonal, mechanical activity. It denies the image of God within us.

1. The Harm to Morality

Aside from the question of sin, there is another closely allied principle, which we call "Morality." We first observe that there is a wide belief that

"Deep within his conscience man discovers a law which he has not laid upon himself but which he must obey. Its voice calls him to love to do good and avoid evil. It is sometimes called natural law and allows him or her to recognize the

moral quality of any act whether it is good or bad. Conscience and the ability to seek good and avoid evil is inscribed in his heart by God."[\[3\]](#)

The moralists agree that our conscience calls us to be chaste, a personal moral virtue. Indulgence or participation in the pornography explosion can be labeled an unchaste, licentious, and morally evil. As such, it is destructive of *Personal Morality*.

Pornography also violates Public Morality since universally the people of the various countries have legislated against it as an evil. The obscenity law of the State of New York, for example, is contained in Title M of the Penal Law and is labeled "Offenses Against Public Health and Morals." The United States Federal Government and the States in the Union have extensive laws against obscenity. In the United States it is recognized that the police power gives the Government the right to legislate on the basis of health, safety, welfare, and morals. There is a right in the Government, says the United States Supreme Court, to "[maintain a decent society](#)."[\[4\]](#) It is obvious that those who violate the laws on obscenity and material harmful to minors and indecency in broadcasting violate the collective judgment of the people as to what constitutes "public morality" embodied in these laws. Such obscenity and indecency violations tend to destroy the protection of public morality desired by the people.

1. The Harm to Marriage

Dr. Victor B. Cline is a psychologist at the University of Utah with a private practice as a psychotherapist specializing in family marital counseling and sexual addiction. He has counseled numerous couples where one of the partners has a sexual addiction to pornography. He is the author of the booklet "[Pornography's Effects on Adults and Children](#)," published by Morality in Media,

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In this work, Dr. Cline says:

"As a clinical psychologist, I have treated, over many years, approximately 300 sex addicts, sex offenders, or other individuals (96% male) with sexual illnesses. This includes many types of unwanted compulsive sexual acting out plus such things as child molestation, voyeurism, sadomasochism, fetishism, and rape. With only several exceptions, pornography has been a major or minor contributor or facilitator in the acquisition of their deviation or sexual addiction..."

Dr. Cline continues:

"I have found a four-factor syndrome common to nearly all of my clients, with almost no exceptions."

(A) ADDICTION

"The first change that happened was an addiction-effect. The porn-consumers got hooked. Once involved in pornographic materials, they kept coming back for more and still more. The material seemed to provide a very powerful sexual stimulant or aphrodisiac effect, followed by sexual release, most often through masturbation."

"Once addicted, they could not throw off their dependence on the material by themselves, despite many negative consequences such as divorce, loss of family, and problems with the law ..."

"I also found ... that many of my most intelligent male patients appeared to be most vulnerable-perhaps because they had a greater capacity to fantasize."

"While any male is vulnerable, attorneys, accountants, and media people seemed-in my experience-most vulnerable to these addictions."

Dr. Cline then quotes Sgt. Navarro, a long time investigator of the porno industry with the Los Angeles Police Department, who says:

"Believe it or not, the higher their education, the more prone these people are to becoming addicted to this material, and, of course, the more money they have to spend on it."

Dr. Cline continues:

"Many people have testified to their extreme addiction ... in terms of having their whole life consumed by it ... Like an alcoholic or a drug addict, they are looking for 'that big kick,' ... When the 'wave' hits them, nothing can stand in the way of getting what they want, including sex from a prostitute or raping a woman."

(B) ESCALATION

Dr. Cline tells us:

"The second phase was an escalation-effect. With the passage of time, the addicted person required rougher, more explicit, more deviant, and 'kinky' kinds of sexual material to get their 'highs' and 'sexual turn-ons.' ... Being married or in a relationship with a willing sexual partner did not solve their problem. Their addiction and escalation were mainly due to the powerful sexual imagery in their minds, implanted there by the exposure to pornography. They often prefer this sexual imagery, accompanied by masturbation, to sexual intercourse itself. This nearly always diminished their capacity to love and express affection ... Their sex drive is diverted to a degree away from their spouse-and the spouse easily senses this, and often feels very lonely and rejected."

(C) DESENSITIZATION

"The third phase was desensitization. ... Pornography which was originally perceived as shocking, taboo-breaking, illegal, repulsive, or immoral, though still sexually arousing, in time came to be seen as acceptable and commonplace. ... There is an increasing sense that 'everybody does it' and this gave them permission to also do it, even though the activity was possibly illegal and contrary to their previous moral beliefs and personal standards."

(D) ACTING OUT SEXUALLY

"The fourth phase that occurs is an increasing tendency to act out sexually the behaviors viewed in the pornography, including compulsive promiscuity, exhibitionism, group sex, voyeurism, frequenting massage parlors, having sex with minor children, rape, and inflicting pain on themselves or a partner during sex."

SUMMARY

"In my clinical experience, however, the major consequence of being addicted to pornography is not the probability or possibility of committing a serious sex crime (though this can and does occur), but rather the disturbance of the fragile bonds of intimate family and marital relationships. This is where the most grievous pain, damage, and sorrow occur. There is repeatedly an interference with or even destruction of healthy love and sexual relationships with long-term bonded partners. If one asks if porn is responsible or causes any sex crimes, the answer is unequivocally, "Yes," but that is only the tip of the iceberg."

1. The Harm of Violence Toward and the Degradation of Women

In 1985 the Congress of the United States authorized and President Reagan appointed a Commission, later known as the Attorney General's Commission, to determine the nature, extent and impact on society of pornography in the United States. In making its final report, and after examining the social science research, this Commission said in relation to sexually violent material:

"The clinical and experimental evidence supports the conclusion that there is a causal relationship between exposure to sexually violent materials and an increase in aggressive behavior directed towards women ... We have reached the conclusion, unanimously and confidentially ... that substantial exposure to sexually violent materials ... bears a causal relationship to anti-social acts of sexual violence and, for some subgroups, possibly to unlawful acts of sexual violence ..."[5]

"The evidence is also strongly supportive of significant attitudinal changes on the part of those with substantial exposure to violent pornography ... and leads to a greater acceptance of the 'rape myth' ... that women enjoy being coerced into sexual activity, that they enjoy being physically hurt in a sexual context and that as a result a man who forces himself on a woman sexually is in fact merely acceding to the 'real' wishes of the woman regardless of the extent to which she seems to be resisting. The myth is that a woman who says 'no' really means 'yes' ... This attitude is both pervasive and profoundly harmful ... any stimulus reinforcing or increasing the incidence of this attitude is ... properly designated as harmful."[6]

The Commission next considered the harm of nonviolent materials depicting degradation, domination, subordination or humiliation of women and said:

"The non-violent ... material studies ... portray women as 'masochistic, subservient ... nymphomaniacs and overresponsive to serving the male interest.'[7]

The Commission continues:

"An enormous amount of the most sexually explicit material ... as well as much of the material that is somewhat less sexually explicit, is material that we would classify as 'degrading,' the term we use to encompass the undeniably linked characteristics of degradation, subordination and humiliation ... depicting people, usually women, as existing solely for the sexual satisfaction of others, usually men, or that depicts ... women in decidedly subordinate roles in their sexual relations ... or depicts people engaged in sexual roles most people consider humiliating."[8]

The Commission concludes that such depictions support the conclusion that degrading porn causes attitudinal changes in the psyche of those who consume it and that:

"Substantial exposure to materials of this variety is likely to increase the extent to which those exposed will view rape or other forms of sexual violence as less serious than they otherwise would have and will view the victims of rape and other forms of sexual violence as significantly more responsible ... and will increase the acceptance of the proposition that women like to be forced into sexual practices."[9]

The Commission also touches on material that is non-violent and possibly non-degrading because depicted as consensual. Of this the Commission Report says:

"The manner of presentation almost necessarily suggests that the activities are taking place outside of the context of love, commitment or even affection ... It is far from implausible to hypothesize that such materials, depicting such activity, bear some causal relationship to sexual activity without marriage, love, commitment or affection ... to the extent that the character of sex is public rather than private ... then to many this would constitute harm."[\[10\]](#)

1. The Harm to Children

We are again indebted to the Attorney General's Commission for a succinct statement of the obvious fact that harm results from exposure of children to so-called "adult" pornography when they said:

"Perhaps the most significant potential harm in non-violent materials exists with respect to children ... much, probably most, and maybe even all material in this category ... is harmful when it falls into the hands of children. Exposure to sexuality is commonly taken, and properly so, to be primarily the responsibility of the family ... We have no hesitancy in concluding that learning about sex from the kinds of sexually explicit material in this category is not the best way for children to learn about the subject ... There are harms to the children themselves and to notions of family control over a child's introduction to sexuality ... We have little doubt that much of this material finds its way into the hands of children."

"For children to be taught by these materials that sex is public, that sex is commercial and that sex can be divorced from any degree of affection, love, commitment or marriage is the wrong message at the wrong time."[\[11\]](#)

The vilest form of pornography is child pornography. The Attorney General's Commission comments:

"The distinguishing characteristic of child pornography ... is that actual children are photographed while engaged in some form of sexual activity, either with adults or with other children, [causing] a special harm. ... Children as young as one week up to the age of majority are induced to engage in sexual activity ... and ... are photographed while engaging in that activity. The inevitably permanent record of that sexual activity created by a photograph is rather plainly a harm to the children photographed ... [and] the very activity involved in creating the photograph in itself is an act of sexual exploitation of children ... The issues related to the sexual abuse of children and ... child pornography are inextricably linked."[\[12\]](#)

1. The Harms Caused by Rapists Fueled by Pornography

Studies by social scientist Dr. W.L. Marshall found that almost half of rapists used pornography depicting consenting sex to arouse themselves preparatory to seeking out a victim to rape.[13] Other investigators have reported that rapists and child molesters use pornography both immediately prior to their crimes and during the actual assault.[14] Empirical research by Dr. Zillman and Dr. Bryant suggests that where experimental subjects are exposed to repeated presentations of hard-core non-violent pornography over a six-week period they develop an increased callousness toward women and trivialize rape as a criminal offense and to some it was no longer a crime and view non-monogamous relationships are normal and natural behavior." [15]

Dr. Malmuth and his associates found that when college males were exposed to sexually violent pornography such as rape and other forms of sexual violence, two-thirds of the male subjects, following such exposure, indicated an increased willingness to force a woman into sex acts if they were assured of not being caught or punished.[16] Dr. Feshbach and his associates conducted similar research at the University of California at Los Angeles and found that 51% of normal college males who took part in the experiment indicated the likelihood of emulating a sadomasochistic rape seen in the porn materials utilized in the study if they were assured of not being caught.[17]

1. Pornography's Effects On 'Performers'

The Attorney General's Commission was the first commission to fully examine the special problems presented by the use of actual persons to create sexually explicit materials and to receive testimony from actual performers in the sex industry. The Commission tells us:

"Typically young women and men answer advertisements seeking 'models' and only later discover nudity or sexual intercourse is involved in the work ... At least some performers have been physically coerced ... We heard direct testimony from three unrelated women who each described how brutal force was used to push her into pornography ... Actual force seems concentrated in the fringe areas of bondage, sadomasochism and home-made noncommercial porn ... During a typical day of filming an X-rated movie or video, a performer is expected to engage in at least two sex scenes ... Females, but not males, are normally expected to engage in homosexual as well as heterosexual acts ... Any one model may have twenty-four to thirty-two different sexual partners every month ... the odds of contracting sexually transmitted diseases are very high." [18]

"In an interview with Hustler magazine a porn performer said:

"There is an incredible fear of AIDS ... We are scared to death that we will find out in three years we've got only a few months left" [19]

"Along with the insidious threat of infectious disease, models face a more overt challenge ... drug use and in particular, use of cocaine. Few aspects seem less free from doubt than the dependence ... on cocaine ... such abuse exists and inflicts serious damage on those it touches."[\[20\]](#)

The Commission concludes:

"It seems clear ... that the bulk of commercial pornographic modeling ... which include sexual intercourse quite simply is a form of prostitution."[\[21\]](#)

1. Nude Performances

At this point it seems appropriate to describe the victimization of females in the sexually oriented business of nude performances. By definition, activities in these establishments fit either of Webster's definitions of pornography previously defined. Certainly it is "a portrayal of erotic behavior designed to cause sexual excitement."

Mr. David Sherman, former Midwest manager of Déjà vu, a chain of strip-joints, explains how "adult businesses" manipulate young girls who they have as waitresses to eventually take their clothes off and dance nude on the stage by creating a sense of family and necessity and plying them with alcohol. At this point she easily disrobes and she is into a life of "sex, drugs, alcohol and prostitution" and "lap" dancing and nudity.[\[22\]](#)

1. Peep Show Booths in Adult Book Stores and the Harm to Patrons and the Public

In the United States there are many communities that have adult book stores and as an adjunct, in the back of the store, a series of booths interconnected in which are found peep show machines showing pornography which can be activated by the patron by depositing a series of quarters. About waist high, between the booths, you will often find a hole, called a "glory" hole, into the next booth. After being stimulated by the porn, the patron will have anonymous sex with the occupant of the adjoining booth.

Some communities have received medical and scientific opinion that such activity facilitates the spread of AIDS and other communicable sexual diseases. They have passed legislation requiring that the doors be taken off such booths and the "glory" holes be plugged. These communities recognize that there is not only harm from such activity to the patron, but the potential of harm to the community by patrons contracting AIDS in such establishments and spreading the same to the general population.

The National Centers for Disease Control have endorsed legislation to close or regulate such establishments, saying such anonymous contact or having intercourse with multiple partners:

"clearly could lead to transmission of the AIDS virus as well as other sexually transmitted diseases."[\[23\]](#)

One of the difficulties cited in the studies is that it is difficult or impossible to trace and treat sexual partners if one who uses a "glory" hole is later diagnosed with AIDS.[\[24\]](#)

1. Serial Murderers Fueled by Pornography

Addiction to pornography can lead apparently normal people to commit the ultimate crime of murder of a fellow human being. This is a hard saying, but its truth lies in the stories and confessions of serial killers.

1. Gary Bishop, Serial Killer

Gary Bishop, a convicted homosexual pedophile, murdered five young boys in Salt Lake City, Utah, in order to conceal his sexual abuse of them. After his conviction he wrote a letter which revealed the fact that pornography and his addiction to it was the root cause of his murders. It said:

"Pornography was a determining factor in my downfall. Somehow I became sexually attracted to young boys and I would fantasize about them naked. Certain bookstores offered sex education photographs or art books which occasionally contained pictures of nude boys. I purchased such books and used them to enhance my masturbatory fantasies.

"But it wasn't enough. I desired more sexually arousing pictures so I enticed boys to let me take pictures of them naked. From adult magazines, I located companies specializing in kiddie porn."

"Such material would temporarily satisfy my cravings, but soon I would need pictures more explicit and revealing ... Finding and procuring sexually arousing materials became an obsession. For me, seeing pornography was like lighting a fire on a stick of dynamite. I became stimulated and had to gratify my urges or explode."[\[25\]](#)

Note: The balance of this letter explained how he sexually abused and killed his boy victims.

1. Ted Bundy, Serial Killer

Serial killer Ted Bundy killed at least 28 young women and girls. He was interviewed on the day before he was executed by Dr. James Dobson, a well-known psychologist.

Bundy told Dobson that "I encountered soft core porn in the local drug store (and later) came across pornographic books of a harder nature."

Dr. Dobson asked whether these included violence. Bundy answered, "Yes, and this is something I want to emphasize as the most damaging kinds of pornography."

Dobson asked if "it fulfilled your fantasies." Bundy said:

"In the beginning it fuels this kind of thought process. Then at a certain time, it's instrumental in what I would say crystallizing it ... At that point ... I was on the verge of acting out these kinds of thoughts ... and it happened in stages ... my experience with pornography that deals on a violent level with sexuality is that once you become addicted ... I would keep looking for more explicit, more graphic kinds of materials ... until you reach the point where the pornography only goes so far. You reach that jumping-off point where you begin to wonder if maybe actually doing it will give you that which is beyond just reading about it or looking at it. ..."

Bundy continues:

"The influence of violent pornography-which is an indispensable link in the chain of behavior ... the assaults, the murders and what have you ... I know that I could not control it ... that these barriers that I had learned as a child were not enough to hold me back with respect to seeking out and harming somebody."

Bundy then says:

"I think people need to recognize that those of us who have been influenced by ... pornographic violence-are not some kind of inherent monsters. We are your sons and we are your husbands. ... Any pornography can reach out and snatch a kid out of any house to-day."

"I've lived in prison for a long time ... and I've met a lot of men who were motivated to commit violence just like me. And without exception every one of them was deeply involved in pornography -- deeply influenced by an addiction. There is no question about it. The FBI's own study shows that the most common interest among serial killers is pornography."[\[26\]](#)

1. Jeffrey Dahmer, Serial Killer

Jeffrey Dahmer drugged and killed 17 men and boys. As related in a confession to the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation and often had sex with the body. When asked what motivated him, he told the FBI in 1992, "heavy drinking, pornography, and masturbation" -- admitting while in the U.S. Army he found graphic porn in Germany and spent thousands of dollars on it. He admitted to killing as often as once a week.[\[27\]](#)

Conclusion

The available evidence from testimony, research, social science studies, and interviews with sexual offenders indicates that the production and consumption of pornography causes grave harm to society and individuals. These harms can be enumerated as follows:

1. Harm to the Soul
2. Harm to Personal Morality and Chastity
3. Harm to Public Morality
4. Harm to Marriage
5. Harm of Violence Toward Women
6. Harm of Degradation of Women
7. Harm to Children

8. Harm of stimulations resulting in Rape

9. Harm of Contracting AIDS and other Venereal Diseases in Peep Show Booths and Spreading the Same to the Public

10. Harm to Performers in the production of porno films and videos

11. Harm to Performers in Nude Dancing Establishments

12. Harm to innocent persons criminally assaulted and murdered by those stimulated by porn, including Serial Murderers

ENDNOTES

[1]

Webster's Third International Dictionary

[2] Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 565. (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana. Approved by Pope John Paul II in 1992)

[3] Id. at paragraph 1776

[4] Paris Adult Theatre I v. Slaton, 413 US 49 (1973)

[5]

Final Report of the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography. Nashville, Tenn.: Rutledge Hill Press, 1986. p. 39

[6] Id. at page 40.

[7] Id. at page 41

[8] Id. at page 41

[9] Id. at page 42

[10] Id. at page 44

[11] Id. at page 45

[12] Id. at page 66

[13]

"A Report on the Use of Pornography by Sexual Offenders," Federal Department of Justice, Ottawa, Canada, 1983

[14] Silber, M.H., and Pines, A.M. "Pornography and Sexual Abuse of Women," in Sex Roles, Vol. 10, pp. 857-868, 1984.

[15] Cline, V.B. Pornography's Effects on Adults and Children. New York: Morality in Media, 1999 edition. p. 8.

[16] Symposium on Media Violence and Pornography, Media Action Group, Toronto, Canada, 1984

[17] "Sex and Aggression: Proving the Link," in Psychology Today, Nov. 1978, pp. 111-112, and "Rape Fantasies as a Function of Exposure to Violent Sexual Stimuli," Archives of Sexual Behavior, Vol. 10, pp. 34-37, 1986.

[18] Final Report of the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography. Nashville, Tenn.: Rutledge Hill Press, 1986. pp. 232-236.

[19] Id. at page 236

[20] Id. at page 237

[21] Id. at page 242

[22] Id. at page 242

[23] Reported in the Allentown Morning Call, Allentown, Pa., December 22, 1985

[24] Letter by Director of Public Health, Dr. James Haughton, to the Mayor of Houston, Texas.

[25] Cline, V.B. Pornography's Effects on Adults and Children. New York: Morality in Media, 1999 edition. p. 9.

[26]

Dobson, J., interview with Ted Bundy, Florida State Prison, January 24, 1989.

[27] "Inside the Mind of Jeffery Dahmer," APBNews.com, August 10, 2000.

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