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The Documented Effects of Pornography

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In the September issue of The Forerunner (Vol. X, No. VI), we examined the relationship between pornography and violent crime in an article entitled "Mass Murder and Pornography - Are They Related?"

Since the publication of the September issue, we have received a number of responses challenging the claim that pornography and violent crime are related. These responses implored us to use real, honest and acceptable facts in defending this position. As a follow up to the many questions generated by this article, we have decided to give a more complete overview of the research that has been done in this area.

The Effects of Pornography

Defenders of pornography argue that it is not harmful, and thus should not be regulated or banned. Citing the 1970 Presidential Commission on Obscenity and Pornography, they conclude that there is no relationship between exposure to erotic material and subsequent behavior. But two subsequent decades of research based on the increased production of more explicit and violent forms of pornography has shown the profound effects pornography can have on human behavior.

Psychologist Edward Donnerstein (University of Wisconsin) found that brief exposure to violent forms of pornography can lead to anti-social attitudes and behavior. Male viewers tend to be more aggressive towards women, less responsive to pain and suffering of rape victims, and more willing to accept various myths about rape. 1

Dr. Dolf Zimmerman and Dr. Jennings Bryant showed that continued exposure to pornography had serious adverse effects on beliefs about sexuality in general and on attitudes toward women in particular. They also found that pornography desensitizes people to rape as a criminal offense.2

These researchers also found that massive exposure to pornography encourages a desire for increasingly deviant materials which involve violence, like sadomasochism and rape.3

Feminist author Diana Russell notes in her book Rape and Marriage the correlation

between deviant behavior (including abuse) and pornography. She also found that pornography leads men and women to experience conflict, suffering, and sexual dissatisfaction.⁴

Researcher Victor Cline (University of Utah) has documented in his research how men become addicted to pornographic materials, begin to desire more explicit or deviant material, and end up acting out what they have seen.⁵

According to Charles Keating of Citizens for Decency Through Law, research reveals that 77 percent of child molesters of boys and 87 percent of child molesters of girls admitted imitating the sexual behavior they had seen modeled in pornography.

Sociologists Murray Straus and Larry Baron (University of New Hampshire) found that rape rates are highest in states which have high sales of sex magazines and lax enforcement of pornography laws.⁶

Michigan state police detective Darrell Pope found that of the 38,000 sexual assault cases in Michigan (1956-1979), in 41 percent of the cases pornographic material was viewed just prior to or during the crime. This agrees with research done by psychotherapist David Scott who found that "half the rapists studied used pornography to arouse themselves immediately prior to seeking out a victim."

The Final Report of the 1986 Attorney General's Commission on Pornography lists a full chapter of testimony (197-223) from victims whose assailants had previously viewed pornographic materials. The adverse effects range from physical harm (rape, torture, murder, sexually transmitted disease) to psychological harm (suicidal thoughts, fear, shame, nightmares).

The Facts on Pornography

A day-care director, now serving three years for three counts of first-degree sexual assault, confessed the he had "started picking up pornographic materials occasionally, going to bookstores ... no one knew, not even my wife ... now I do recognize fully the shocking facts about pornography and how it will draw you into its clutches away from God into sinful fantasies ..."

Multiplied incidents like the above graphically illustrate how the \$8 billion-per-year porn industry has carved inroads into American life:

* Nearly 900 theaters show X-rated films and more than 15,000 "adult" bookstores and video stores offer pornographic material, outnumbering McDonald's restaurants in the U.S. by a margin of at least three to one.

* Each year, nearly 100 full-length pornographic films provide estimated annual box office sales of \$50 million.

* Approximately 70% of the pornographic magazines sold eventually end up in the hands of

minors.

* About 1.2 million children are annually exploited through child pornography and prostitution.⁷

God's Purpose in Sex

The tragedy of sex apart from God's ideal standard was no more forcefully presented than by this young lady who testified in Chicago before the 1986 Commission on Pornography:

"I am a former Playboy Bunny ... I never questioned the morality of becoming a Playboy Bunny because the magazine was accepted at home. [During my time with Playboy] I experienced everything from date-rape to physical abuse to group sex and finally to fantasizing homosexuality as I read Playboy magazine.

"I was extremely suicidal and sought psychiatric help for the eight years I lived in a sexually promiscuous fashion. There was no help for me until I changed my lifestyle to be a follower of Jesus Christ and obeyed the biblical truths including no premarital sex."

The agony of this young lady - and others like her - could have been avoided through an understanding of and obedience to God's purposes in sex.

Pornography attacks the dignity of men and women created in the image of God. ⁸ It also distorts God's gift of sex which should be shared only within the bounds of marriage.⁹ And it frequently promotes sexual perversion (rape, incest, sodomy, bondage, torture, pedophilia) which is condemned by God.

From a biblical perspective, sexual intercourse is exclusively reserved for marriage for the following purposes:

- * First, it establishes the "one-flesh" union.¹⁰
- * Second, it provides for sexual intimacy within the marriage bond. The use of the word "know" indicates a profound meaning of sexual intercourse. ¹¹
- * Third, sexual intercourse is for the mutual pleasure of husband and wife. ¹²
- * Fourth, sexual intercourse is for procreation. ¹³

The Bible also warns against the misuse of sex. Premarital and extramarital sex is condemned. ¹⁴ Even thoughts of sexual immorality (often fed by pornographic material) are condemned. ¹⁵ Various forms of sexual perversion are also condemned in the Bible.¹⁶

Contrary to popular opinion, the Christian lifestyle of purity and abstaining from premarital and extramarital sex is not repressive or legalistic. People who have adopted

this standard of purity can testify to the liberating power that it has had in their lives. Sexual purity not only is a defense against sexually transmitted diseases such as AIDS, but it also can help to bring about stable and happy marriage and family relationships.

In hoping to live our lives according to biblical standards and obtain the happy benefits of this lifestyle, we must do two things. First, we must keep pure by fleeing immorality and

thinking on those things which are pure. 17 Second, we must work to remove this sexual perversion of pornography from society.

If you have any questions or comments about this subject, please contact us at The Forerunner, P.O. Box 4103, Gainesville, FL 32613

- 1 Pornography and Violence Against Women, 1980.
- 2 "Pornography, Sexual Callousness, and the Trivialization of Rape," Journal of Communication, 1982.
- 3 "The Effect of Erotica Featuring Sadomasochism and Bestiality of Motivated Inter-Male Aggressions," Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 1981. 4 Rape and Marriage, 1982.
- 5 "Where Do You Draw the Line?" 1974.
- 6 "Legitimate Violence and Rape: A Test of the Cultural Spillover Theory," 1985.
- 7 Henry Boatwright, Chairman of the U.S. Advisory Board of Social Concerns. 8 Genesis 1:27. 9 1 Corinthians 7:2-3.
- 10 Genesis 2:24-25; Matthew 19:4-6. 11 Genesis 4:1.
- 12 Proverbs 5:18-19. 13 Genesis 1:28.
- 14 1 Corinthians 6:13-18; 1 Thessalonians 4:3.
- 15 Matthew 5:27-28. 16 Leviticus 18:6,23; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.
- 17 1 Corinthians 6:18; Philippians 4:8.

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