

PORNOGRAPHY OVERVIEW

In June (1987) a 12-year-old San Francisco boy spent two hours on the telephone (Dial-A-Porn) listening to rape and incest accounts and two weeks later sexually assaulted a 4-year-old girl.

Just prior to his execution in Florida's electric chair for the brutal murders of numerous young women, Ted Bundy confessed that...pornography...had motivated him to commit those crimes.
—USA Today (1987, December 10).

Pornography is no longer limited to downtown adult bookstores, movie houses, and amateurish 8mm movies. It has grown in acceptance and is now readily available at suburban newsstands, convenience stores, and on high quality videotapes at nearly every video rental store. Audio versions are even available over the phone. The recent growth in the pornography industry has many people concerned about the possible negative effects such material has on youth.

One explanation for the pornography explosion may be traced to the 1970 President's Commission Report on Pornography. The commission made four basic statements about pornography:

- It is harmless, and even has potential positive therapeutic and cathartic value.
- It has no negative effects on adults or children.
- It is not a social problem.
- Its production and distribution should be free from regulation or control.

In dissention with the majority report, commissioners Morton Hill and Winfrey Link declared the report "a Magna Carta for the pornography industry." Fortunately, the U.S. Senate overwhelmingly rejected the report. Still, the press highlighted the report and, within months, *Penthouse* magazine expanded the boundaries of pornography by becoming the first national magazine to show pubic hair. Since then, sexual impropriety has proliferated as mainstream pornographic magazines have featured any of the following: genital, oral, and anal intercourse; hetero-, homo-, and autosexual acts; orgies, bondage, rapes, and gang rapes.

At the time of the 1970 report, there was little research regarding the effects of pornography, and the type of pornography available was much more benign than today's material. In May 1985, the U.S. Attorney General announced the formation of a special commission to investigate the effects of pornography and to make recommendations on the control of pornography within the guidelines of

First Amendment rights. This commission's report appears to be a better portrait of pornography.

Pornography is best defined as "material that is predominantly sexually explicit and intended primarily for the purpose of sexual arousal." For many people, pornography and obscenity are synonymous, but numerous others do not find certain types of pornography to be obscene. The Attorney General's Commission found the same problem as they tried to use the term pornography when dealing with material that ranged from simple nude art work to videos of actual child sexual abuse. They identified five classes of pornography and their effects on individuals:

Class I: Sexually violent material. Materials that depict or describe rape, bondage, and forced sex are included in this category. The depictions typically include a reluctant woman being physically forced to engage in sexual activity. An alarming theme in most of this material shows the woman becoming sexually excited during the abuse, eventually wanting the abuse to continue. Another subcategory of this violent material involves "slasher" horror films that frequently combine non-violent sexual scenes with gruesome murder depictions.

Effect. Research indicates a causal relationship between this type of material and aggression toward women. This does not infer that every person who views this type of material will rape, but rather that this material strongly affects viewers' attitudes—especially males—and makes rape appear less offensive. Victims of rape are viewed as more responsible for the attack than the rapist. There is also a greater acceptance of the 'rape myth' that women enjoy being forced into sexual activity.

Class II: Non-violent materials depicting degradation, domination, subordination, or humiliation. This encompasses women performing normal or bizarre sexual acts for the sole purpose of serving men's sexual desires. This material objectifies women and includes non-violent coercion into sexual relations. An abundance of material depicting urination and defecation as part of sexual experience is included in this category, as are illustrations of women unreservedly inviting sexual intercourse, and women having sex with numerous men.

Effect. The effect is substantially similar to that of the violent materials, however there has been much less research done on the effects of this type of material. Clearly this type of material contributes to the rape myth, that suggests when a woman says 'no,' she means 'yes.'

Class III: Non-violent and non-degrading materials. This classifies depictions of two consenting adults with equal roles and enjoyment; it can include both genital and oral sexual acts. Surprisingly, only a tiny amount of pornography falls into this category. Much of what may appear to be in this category is more likely to fall into Class II, since male domination is emphasized in most pornography, and because males are the primary buyers. Since the motion picture industry targets both men and women, and because many women may take offense of male domination, their depictions of consensual sexual relations is the most common example of this type.

Effect. Virtually no research has been done specifically on the effects of this material. The Attorney General's Commission agreed that there is currently no conclusive research showing that this type of material does or does not contribute to sexual violence. There is some evidence that it has a therapeutic effect on sexual offenders: 'sex therapists have for years used carefully selected erotic material, to recondition men with sexual deviations out of their problems.' It is fallible to assume that such erotic material has no negative effects. For those who believe that sexual relations were designed only for marriage, the viewing of erotic material cannot be expected to aid one in upholding that conviction. Additionally, it is common, even for a married person, to feel coerced to engage in sexual practices that are displayed in this type of material. Coercion, even non-violent, is harmful.

Class IV: Nudity. The display of the human body apart from a context of sexual activity falls under this category. This material includes nudity used for educational purposes or contained in purely artistic works. There are cases where the nude portraits, free of real or implied sexual activity, may producing similar reactions as in the previous categories.

Effect. The human body or its portrayal cannot be considered harmful. It is the context of such nudity that presents the problem. If the nude individual portrayed invites sexual activity, that changes the depiction to another category. An Arizona State University study showed that exposure to Playboy or Penthouse centerfolds and even to nude photographs of average looking women has a direct negative effect on the evaluation of other average looking, clothed women. While the material has some effect, no one knows how much. Unfortunately, there has been no research on the effects of nudity on children, relationships between the sexes, or attitudes toward sexual relations.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. How would you define pornography, and in what kinds of situations are people exposed to it?
2. Is pornography harmful to a society?
3. Does pornography hurt women, children, and men? Does it contribute to sexual violence? Does it produce a desensitization about sexual violence and its victims? Explain.
4. How can one protect him- or herself and others from the influences of pornography?
5. Is morality strictly a personal issue, or do societal institutions (schools and government) bear responsibility for socializing and reinforcing positive sexual values?
6. To what extent is obscenity protected under the First Amendment?
7. What responsibilities does one have today concerning this issue and its influences on one's life and society?
8. What place do religious values have in a pluralistic society?

IMPLICATIONS

1. Research has determined that sexually violent pornography (Class I) contributes to sexual offenders' violence, non-sexual offenders' opinions about rape, and the "rape myth." Though this effect is substantially greater among men than among women, this material, including "slasher" films, should be avoided.
2. Normal persons exposed to any pornography can expect sort of attitudinal harm, especially with prolonged exposure. All pornography should be considered harmful to some degree; avoidance should be encouraged.
3. Sex is a fascinating topic for boys, girls, and older youth. They are primarily influenced by peers, and peer groups are influenced by media. Raise questions about the sexual values taught by the media.
4. The Attorney General's Commission unanimously agreed on the effects of pornography on children. This is a special concern, since it is estimated that nearly 70% of all pornography ends up in the hands of youth under age 17.
5. Pornography, by definition, arouses the sexual passions of its viewers; no one is immune. Those working with youth should help kids learn that it is impossible to escape its effects. Youth should ask, "What is the effect on me?"
6. Sexually transmitted diseases are forcing a re-evaluation of our sexual mores. Parents, teachers, and youth leaders should be involved in telling kids about sex is and influencing how it should be portrayed socially.
7. The relationship between freedom and responsibility needs critical consideration among young people. The responsibility of government, schools, media, families, and individuals to sexual mores and public expression must also be examined.

8. Though the spread of promiscuity cannot be traced to the growth in pornography, it is wise to understand that pornography is consistently competing against the view that premarital sexual relations are wrong. Prolonged exposure to such sexually explicit material can only be expected to soften one's resolve for sexual purity until marriage.

Chet Klope cCYS
