

Social Costs of Pornography

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Introduction

By way of a brief introduction, I would like to say the following. My father had three stashes of smut in the basement: a stash of *Playboy* magazines, a stash of “men’s magazines,” and a small stash of hardcore pornography. The latter was under lock & key. I got into all of it while still in grade school.

My primary modus operandi was to connect in my mind (fantasize about) what I read in the “men’s magazines” to the *Playboy* foldouts that I was most attracted to. I find it amazing that I started writing my own pornography when I was a freshman or sophomore in high school, which is an indication to me of how strong the grip of pornography can be on a boy’s life, or a teen’s life, or a young adult’s life.

Like many “boomers,” I fell away from the Lord when I went to college. When by His grace I came back to a faith in Jesus at the beginning of my second year in law school, I was smoking like a steam locomotive, drinking like a fish, and going to Times Square on a regular basis to buy hardcore pornographic magazines. It would take about one year to stop drinking; two years to stop smoking; and seven years to stop going up to Times Square to buy porn. This is another indication of how addictive pornography can be.

I will conclude with this. I did not seek a job at Morality in Media so that I could fight pornography. In April 1985, Morality in Media’s then general counsel, Paul J. McGeady, called me “out of the blue” and offered me a job as a staff attorney. I had met Paul previously but had never said I would like to work for MIM. If anything, my past experience with pornography was a good reason to then say, “No thanks.” When I accepted the job, I planned on staying two or three years.

Going on 24 years later, I must say that part of what now motivates me to stay in this fight is my experience with pornography. I know what it can do to a person. With this introduction, I now turn to the social costs of pornography.

Harm to female participants in the production of hardcore pornography

As with prostitution, so with pornography, there are individuals who seem to adjust to the “lifestyle.” We often hear from these “success stories” in the mainstream media, as

they defend or promote their livelihoods. But the reality for most women in pornography is not positive. During my early years at MIM, I wondered why a beautiful young woman would choose to be in pornography. I have since come across many sources indicating that most of these women were sexually abused or otherwise badly damaged as children.

One source in particular that surprised me was an article in the *Adult Video News* (K. Smith, “Awful Truth,” Feb. 1999) about sexual harassment in the production of hardcore pornography. The author stated, “A huge number of people come to the adult industry already disenfranchised, their bodies and their sexuality rendered worthless to them by an abuser.” Mr. Smith also readily acknowledged that sexual harassment was a problem.

Contrary to the perceptions of some, most hardcore pornography is not “just two (or perhaps three) people having sex.” Most hardcore pornography is produced for males, and when males become addicted to pornography, they begin to seek out, in the words of psychologist Dr. Victor B. Cline, “rougher, more explicit, more deviant, and ‘kinky’ kinds of sexual material to get their ‘highs’...”

To gratify these increasingly perverse sexual desires, women in pornography are penetrated by two or more males at the same time, gang banged, slapped, choked, spanked, whipped, tied up, tortured, urinated and defecated on, etc. While the women are often paid to look like they enjoy degradation and violence, the reality is often very different. Some take drugs to kill the pain or numb their sensibilities.

Many of these women also contract one or more STDs; and for all of them, there is a permanent record of the degradation. I also think sexual trafficking is part of the explanation for why there is so much extreme hardcore pornography available on the Internet – content that depicts rape and torture and other horrific sexual behavior. Not all these women are being paid for their efforts. Some (perhaps many) are forced into it.

And when teens and adult males seek this abominable material out, we help create the market that ensures that more of it will be made.

Harm to children who view pornography

Many (most) men who are addicted to pornography were first exposed to pornography as children. Exposure to pornography can lead to an addiction that robs children of the opportunity to develop in a healthy manner psychologically, morally, and spiritually. Apart from sexual addiction, children are also harmed when they receive a “sex mis-education” from viewing hardcore pornography, which depicts promiscuous, perverse, degrading, and violent sexual behaviors.

And with the advent of the Internet, children are being exposed to pornography at earlier ages and to more extreme content. According to a recent study, C. Sabina, J. Wolak & D. Finkelhor, “The Nature and Dynamics of Internet Pornography Exposure for Youth,” *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, Vol. 11, No. 6, 2008:

Overall, 72% of participants (93.2% of boys, 61.1% of girls) had seen online pornography before age 18...Most exposure began when youth were ages 14 to 17, and boys were significantly more likely to view online pornography more often and to view more types of images. Considerable numbers of boys and girls had seen images of paraphilic or criminal sexual activity, including child pornography and sexual violence, at least once before the age of 18...Some boys had repeated exposure to sexual violence...

I should add that while male children are more likely to become addicted to pornography than are female children, female children can get wrong ideas from pornography about what is expected of them or about how to please a boy.

“Children” are also harmed when their addiction to pornography follows them into adulthood and prevents or ruins their marriages, costs them their jobs, or contributes to them becoming sex offenders. I would add that the effects of addiction do not necessarily end when an individual breaks the habit of viewing and masturbating to pornography. The longer the addiction lasts, the more it can shape an individual’s sexuality.

Harm to children who are sexually abused

Children are harmed when adult predators use hardcore “adult” pornography to entice, arouse, desensitize and instruct their child victims (a common practice).

There is also evidence that many adult predators begin their downward spiral not by viewing child porn but rather “adult” porn. See, e.g., L. Michel & D. Herbeck, “Confessions of a child porn addict” (*Buffalo News*, 10/17/07), where we read:

“Clarence once enjoyed the adult pornography sites he viewed on the Web. But after a while, the thrill was gone. So he started clicking on some of the ads that popped up on his computer above the naked adults he was watching. He was seeing something new – young teenagers and even young children, posing in the nude, having sex with each other, or being molested by adults. At first, he was appalled. But once the shock wore off, he couldn’t get enough. Like thousands of other men...he was hooked.”

I would add that last year Congress passed a law authorizing the expenditure of hundreds of millions of dollars to combat sexual exploitation of children.

Children are also harmed when they are sexually abused by other children who imitate behavior that they viewed in hardcore pornography. See, e.g., K. Kurtis, “Sex Offenders Younger, More Violent,” AP, 6/9/07 (“And 42 % have been exposed to hardcore pornography, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, an arm of the U.S. Department of Justice, said in a 2001 report.”).

Children are also harmed when they are deceived by pornography into thinking that it is OK to send to others photos or video that they have taken of themselves while nude or partially nude or while engaging in sexual conduct. See, e.g., S. Jayson, “Nude Photos: A new way for young people to flirt?” *USA Today*, 2/16/08. Apart from causing great embarrassment, it can also be a crime.

Harm to marriage

In my opinion, the floodtide of “adult obscenity” (illegal hardcore pornography that does not depict actual children) has become one of the most pressing moral problems of our time, primarily because of its effects on the family.

It is usually the husband who becomes addicted to pornography. This addiction can negatively affect (destroy) a marriage in a number of ways. A husband may lose sexual interest in his wife; he may act out his perverse or violent porn fueled fantasies with his spouse; or he may choose instead to act out his porn fueled fantasies with a prostitute(s). He may also spend tens of thousands of dollars feeding his addiction. Even if the addiction doesn’t destroy a marriage, it can cause the innocent spouse great pain.

Many women are also concerned about the effect of a father’s porn addiction on their children. A child may see the father viewing pornography or may find it on his computer (or elsewhere). In some cases there is concern about sexual abuse. In particular, the latter becomes a concern when dad’s interest in pornography includes “teens,” incest, pseudo child porn, or actual child pornography. See, e.g., Robin S. Whitehead, “What Do the Courts Say? Child Custody, Visitation Rights & Pornography,” published at <http://www.obscenitycrimes.org/visitation.cfm>.

Children are also harmed when addiction to pornography ruins their parents’ marriage.

In particular, I would think “political conservatives” would be concerned about the impact that addiction to pornography is having on marriages, because historically the traditional family has been the building block of society; and to the extent that traditional families lose influence in society, government increases its influence.

In a statement published in *TIME* (“Candidates on Faith,” 8/7/08), Barack Obama also stated: “[W]e must remember that there are a range of moral-values issues that must be addressed in our families.” I would assert that pornography addiction is one such issue

and that reducing the supply through enforcement of obscenity laws will help reduce addiction. Enforcement will also send the message that pornography is a moral evil. In particular, children and young adults (America's future) need to hear that message.

One concern that I have about so many of today's youth and young adults viewing pornography on a regular basis is the effect that this will have on their ability to make a marriage work and even their willingness to enter into a marriage. There is evidence that many young men would prefer to masturbate in front of computers than to spend time with a young woman. See, e.g., D. Amsden, "Not Tonight, Honey. I'm Logging On," *N.Y. Magazine*, 10/20/03; N. Wolf, "The Porn Myth: In the end, porn doesn't whet men's appetites – It turns them off to the real thing," *N.Y. Magazine*, 10/20/03.

Connection to violent sex crimes, prostitution & sexual harassment

There are two extremes in the "debate" about whether pornography causes violent sex crimes (sexual assaults and sexual homicides). One extreme is to blame all such crimes on pornography. This, of course, is ridiculous since violent sex crimes have been occurring at least as far back as the Book of Genesis, Chapter 19.

The other extreme is to ignore the mountain of evidence showing a link between viewing pornography (more accurately, addiction to pornography) and violent sex crimes. See, e.g., R. Peters, "Link Between Pornography & Violent Sex Crimes," 2004 (<http://www.obscenitycrimes.org/Porn-Crime-Link-RWP.cfm>).

In his monograph, "The Effects of Pornography on Adults & Children," psychologist Dr. Victor B. Cline describes four stages in addiction to pornography: addiction (they get hooked), escalation, desensitization and "acting out." Of the last stage, he says:

"The fourth phase was an increasing tendency to act out sexually the behaviors viewed in the pornography, including compulsive promiscuity, exhibitionism, group sex, voyeurism, frequenting massage parlors [where prostitution occurs], having sex with minor children, *rape*... This behavior frequently grew into a sexual addiction which they found themselves locked into and unable to change or reverse no matter what the negative consequences..." [Italics added]

In an article, "Help for the Sexually Desperate" (*Christianity Today*, Mar. 2008), author John W. Kennedy observed: "Viewing pornography is nearly always accompanied by masturbation... 'If a guy masturbates to something it would take a prostitute to do, he's more likely to find one.'" See also, "A facilitator's guide to Prostitution: a matter of violence against women," 1990, WHISPER - Women Hurt in Systems of Prostitution Engaged in Revolt, Minneapolis, MN ("80% of prostitution survivors...reported that their customers showed them pornography to illustrate the kinds of sexual activities in which

they wanted to engage.”). To the extent that addiction to pornography contributes to the demand for prostitutes, it also contributes to sexual trafficking. See, e.g., R. Peters, “Sexual Trafficking & Pornography: The link between the two,” 2008 (<http://www.obscuritycrimes.org/news/SexualTraffickingandPornography.pdf>).

I am also amazed at how many sexual harassment cases that I read about in the local newspapers that involve pornography, sex toys or stripping. See, e.g., J. Martinez, “Ex-VP calls bank honcho horndog,” *N.Y. Daily News*, 01/23/09 (“charging that her boss was a dirty dog who kept porn handy and asked her if she was into public sex.”).

Connection to organized crime

Until the 1980s, the production and distribution of pornography was in large measure controlled or influenced by organized crime. The successful Mi-Porn operation in the early 1980s changed that state of affairs significantly. Mi-Porn targeted organized crime’s connection to pornography and put many major pornographers connected to organized crime out of business.

But the tentacles of organized crime still touch the pornography world. For example, in February 2005 two individuals linked to organized crime pled guilty in a Brooklyn federal court to various charges in connection with an Internet and telephone based pornography racket that brought in \$650 million in 5 years.

The erosion of decency

In a 1973 obscenity case, *Paris Adult Theatre I v. Slaton*, 413 U.S. 49, 59, the Supreme Court stated that there is a “right of the Nation and of the States to maintain a decent society.” As pornography continues to proliferate on the Internet and in other media and as “adult” businesses continue to open in communities large and small, Americans are relinquishing their right to live and raise children in a decent society.

Conclusion

Having lived and worked in New York City for more than 35 years, I fully understand that our modern day “explosion of obscenity” is not the only problem our nation faces. But it is a problem that is causing immense harm to marriages and children and that is linked to the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, including AIDS, sexual exploitation of children, sexual assaults and rape, on the job sexual harassment, and sexual trafficking. Like a cancer, pornography doesn’t kill quickly, but eventually it will kill.