

# Findings

NORTH  
CAROLINA  
*Family*  
POLICY  
COUNCIL

Dedicated to the  
Preservation of the Family.

## Sexual Degradation

### *How Pornography Destroys the Family*

By Alysse M. ElHage



*In An Affair of the Mind, Laurie Hall recounts how her husband's addiction to pornography devastated their family. The son of missionaries, Jack had a*

*secret obsession with porn that began in college with soft-core magazines and escalated to watching X-rated movies, going to strip clubs, and eventually hiring prostitutes to act out his porn-induced fantasies. Throughout their marriage, Jack was emotionally and mentally distant, frequently absent, and neglectful of his wife and kids. By the time Laurie discovered why, they were thousands of dollars in debt, and she was faced with the possibility that Jack had exposed them both to AIDS. In a letter to her husband, Laurie wrote: "I don't understand why you won't let go of the pornography and the hookers. How could you choose them over the children? How could you choose them over me? You were all I ever wanted. How come I wasn't enough for you?"<sup>1</sup>*

Tragically, stories like Laurie's are repeated every day in the lives of countless adults and children who are bombarded by sexually explicit material wherever they turn, and who find themselves or someone they love consumed to the point of destruction.

American society is saturated with pornography. Finding it no longer requires driving to an adult movie theater or strip club. It's available in a variety of retail stores, on pay-per-view cable channels, and on every home, office, or school computer through the Internet. Over the last several years, the number of pornographic web sites has skyrocketed from about 30,000 to an estimated 300,000 sites today.<sup>2</sup> Not only has the

Internet made porn more accessible, it has also brought more hard-core material to the eyes of the general public, such as child porn and bestiality.<sup>3</sup> Retired FBI agent Roger Young, who served as the FBI's lead obscenity investigator for over 20 years, has stated that Internet porn is "without a doubt some of the most degrading, sexually explicit, debased and humiliating hard-core types of pornography that I have ever seen."<sup>4</sup>

Pornographers are cashing in on this proliferation. The porn industry generates an estimated \$10 billion each year in the United States, turning a larger profit than the commercial film industry, as well as professional football, baseball and basketball combined.<sup>5</sup>

Men, including boys ages 12 to 17, account for the majority of porn consumers.<sup>6</sup> For example, 82 percent of *Playboy* magazine consumers, and 77 percent of visitors to pornographic web sites are men.<sup>7</sup> But pornography is a growing problem among women as well. According to Nielsen NetRatings, nearly one in three visitors to "adult" web sites is female.<sup>8</sup>

The explosion of pornography throughout society represents a mounting threat to the family that cannot be ignored. Pornography communicates dangerous messages about sex and the value of human beings that are destructive to the ability of men and women to form and maintain healthy relationships. It also puts every man, woman and child at risk for sexual addiction and sexual violence.

### **What is Pornography?**

Because pornography is not a legal term, it is helpful to begin with a definition and a brief look at the law. "Pornography" comes from two Greek words—*porne*, which means a harlot, and *graphein*, which means to write.<sup>9</sup> The 1986 Attorney General's Commis-

sion on Pornography defined pornography in their final report as material that is "predominately sexually explicit and intended primarily for the purpose of sexual arousal."<sup>10</sup>

The term "pornography" encompasses both legal and illegal materials, and can range from images of partially or completely naked adults in sexually suggestive poses ("soft-core") to graphic descriptions and depictions of every sexual activity imaginable, most of which are degrading to women and/or violent ("hard-core").

Soft-core porn is the type of material found in magazines, such as *Playboy*. While soft-core porn is legal for adults, many states, including North Carolina, have "material harmful to minor" laws, which regulate the sale, display or exhibition of sexually explicit materials to children under age 18.<sup>11</sup>

The most common forms of hard-core pornography consist of one image of "hard-core" sex after another, usually with penetration clearly visible. Examples of extreme hard-core porn include depictions of rape, torture, sex with animals, and sex involving excretory functions.<sup>12</sup>

Hard-core pornographic material can be prosecuted under federal and state obscenity laws. To be considered obscene, a judge or jury must determine that the work (such as a web site, magazine, book, movie, video game, photograph, drawing, or live performance) meets a three-prong test, established by the U.S. Supreme Court. The test is as follows: 1) The average person, applying contemporary community standards, must find that the work, taken as a whole, appeals to the prurient interest (i.e., having or intending to arouse an unwholesome interest in sexual matters); and 2) The work must depict or describe in a patently offensive way, as measured by contemporary community standards,

sexual conduct specifically defined by the applicable law (i.e., ultimate sexual acts, normal or perverted, actual or simulated, masturbation, excretory functions, lewd exhibition of the genitals, or sadomasochistic abuse); and 3) A reasonable person must find the work, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political and scientific value.<sup>13</sup>

Another form of pornography involves sexually explicit images of children, or child pornography. It is illegal to possess, manufacture or distribute child pornography under federal law. Every state also has laws regarding child porn.<sup>14</sup> Increasingly, pedophiles are using the Internet to transmit images of children, as young as infants, being sexually violated by adults or other children.<sup>15</sup>

### **Dangerous Messages**

In addition to understanding what pornography is, it is important to examine what it says about sex and human beings, and what impact these messages have on porn consumers. The natural sexual attraction between men and women is where families begin. To build a family unit that will survive, this attraction must be coupled with love, trust, mutual respect and long-term commitment within the bonds of marriage. Pornography works against the family and the values it depends upon by distorting sex and debasing human beings.

Pornography strips sex of its natural relationship to love, commitment, marriage and procreation, reducing it to a purely physical, selfish act. Consider the following answers from a survey conducted for the 2002 PBS *Frontline* documentary, "American Porn." When over 10,000 adults (ages 18 or older) were surveyed about their reasons for viewing pornography, the top two answers were: "to masturbate/for physical release, and to sexually arouse myself and/or others."<sup>16</sup>

The self-centered focus promoted by porn is the direct opposite of the values of sex within marriage, which involves a husband and wife interacting physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. In addition, pornography glorifies promiscuity, not monogamy or fidelity.

Another core message of pornography is that the bodies of some human beings are for sale and exist primarily for the sexual pleasure of others. The Attorney General's Commission on Pornography noted:

*"An enormous amount of the most sexually explicit material available, 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...material that, although not violent, depicts people, usually women, as existing solely for the sexual satisfaction of others...."*<sup>17</sup>

How do these messages impact porn consumers? Psychologist Gary R. Brooks, Ph. D., a nationally recognized expert in psychotherapy for men, has linked the consumption of pornography to a pervasive disorder in men that he calls the "Centerfold Syndrome."<sup>18</sup> According to Dr. Brooks, this disorder has five key elements, which are:

- 1) Voyeurism, or an obsession with "looking at" women and their bodies.<sup>19</sup>
- 2) Objectification, where multifaceted human beings with hearts, minds, and souls are reduced to mere objects, and rated by the sizes and shapes of their body parts.<sup>20</sup> Objectification was a method used by the Nazis in Germany against the Jews.<sup>21</sup>
- 3) Masculine validation, where men are programmed to depend on beautiful women to validate their manhood.<sup>22</sup>
- 4) Trophyism, where the bodies of "perfect" women are viewed as prizes to conquer in order to prove a man's worth to the world.<sup>23</sup>
- 5) Fear of true intimacy.<sup>24</sup>

Studies where subjects have been repeatedly exposed to porn reveal the direct impact it has on marriage. In a paper commissioned in 1986 by then U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop and later submitted to the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography, researcher Dolf Zillman summarized the empirical research findings on the negative effects of exposure to porn. Zillman reported that repeated exposure to common pornographic materials: promotes the acceptance of pre and extra-marital sexual activity; decreases satisfaction with the sexual performance, affection and physical appearance of intimate partners; and leads to doubts about the value of marriage and to a decrease in the desire to have children (particularly the "desire of females for female offspring").<sup>25</sup>

### **Impact on Youth**

Advocates depict pornography as "adult entertainment." But pornographic materials often find their way into the hands of innocent children. In fact, one of the earliest lessons many children, especially boys, learn about sex comes from pornography. In a 1985 study by Dr.

Jennings Bryant reported to the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography, 600 males and females, ages 13 to 39, were surveyed about their experiences with porn. The study found that 92 percent of junior high boys and 84 percent of junior high girls had "looked at or read" a soft-core porn magazine. The average age of first exposure was 11 for boys, and 12 for girls.<sup>26</sup>

Today, the Internet has greatly increased the chances that more children will be exposed to porn. According to the Youth Internet Safety Survey, conducted between 1999 and 2000, 25 percent of young people ages 10 to 17 reported, "unwanted exposure to sexual material" on the Internet. Of these, 71 percent were exposed to sexual material while they were searching the web. The majority of incidents occurred at home.<sup>27</sup>

Children are especially vulnerable to the powerful messages communicated by pornography. Compared to adults, they are less able to distinguish between what is real and what is not. According to Judith Reisman, Ph.D., who authored a U.S. Department of Justice study on the effects of pornography, "...viewing pornography is a biologically significant event that overrides informed consent and that is harmful to children's 'plastic' brains because it compromises their grasp of reality and thus their mental and physical health, their well-being and their pursuit of happiness."<sup>28</sup>

Because children's value systems are still forming, pornography is a dangerous sex educator. As the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography put it, "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 for us the wrong message at the wrong time."<sup>29</sup>

In 1993, ABC's *20/20* interviewed a group of Duke University students who had formed a group called "Men Acting for Change." During the interview, the young men discussed how their attitudes about sex and women had been shaped by pornography. Comments from the interview include: "The standards of beauty I developed for women were based on images I saw in porn;" and "A magazine picture of a woman never says "no," doesn't talk, doesn't have needs, and when you're done, you just shut the magazine and put it back on the shelf."<sup>30</sup>

In addition to shaping young people's attitudes about sex, pornography can

influence their behavior. According to the 1985 survey by Dr. Bryant cited earlier, 31 percent of high school boys and 18 percent of high school girls who had been exposed to hard-core porn reported actually trying some of the sexual activities they had seen. Dr. Bryant reported that the desire to imitate pornography was highest among younger subjects.<sup>31</sup>

Finally, early exposure to pornography puts children at a greater risk of developing a sexual addiction and/or of becoming a sexual predator. In fact, most sexual addictions develop during middle childhood or adolescence.<sup>32</sup> A recent Australian study of 101 children under age 10 who had sexually abused other children, found that 90 percent admitted to viewing sexually explicit material on the Internet.<sup>33</sup>

### Sexual Addiction

Pornography can be just as addictive as any drug, especially if a person starts using it early enough. "In my experience as a sexual therapist, any individual who regularly masturbates to pornography is at risk of becoming, in time, a sexual addict," writes Victor Cline, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist who has treated over 300 sex offenders or sexual addicts.<sup>34</sup>

According to Dr. Cline, repeated exposure to pornography can lead to: addiction, where the consumer becomes "hooked" on the material; escalation, where the addict, over time, begins to desire more hard-core material to obtain a sexual high; desensitization, where porn they once considered "repulsive" becomes normal; and acting out sexually.<sup>35</sup>

A study of 932 sex addicts conducted by Patrick Carnes, Ph.D., a nationally recognized expert on sex addiction, found that 90 percent of the men and 77 percent of the women reported porn as "significant to their addictions." Dr. Carnes also found two common elements in the development of sex addiction: "childhood sexual abuse and frequent pornography accompanied by masturbation."<sup>36</sup>

Sexual addiction can be harder to treat than other addictions because, unlike drugs or alcohol, the addictive substance cannot be physically removed from the addict's body. "Sex addiction from pornography...produces mental imagery which is permanently implanted in the mind of the user and is scaled in by brain chemistry," writes Mary Anne Laydon, Ph. D., a psychiatrist who specializes in the treatment of sexual violence victims and perpetrators. "This is the first addictive substance for which there is no hope for detoxification."<sup>37</sup>

The Internet has compounded the problem of sex addiction by making porn consumption virtually anonymous, accessible and affordable.<sup>38</sup> According to the National Council on Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity (NCSAC), an estimated two million Americans are addicted to "cybersex," which is defined as "the use of digitized sexual content, obtained either over the Internet or as data retrieved by a computer, for the purpose of sexual arousal and stimulation."<sup>39</sup>

**Effect on Addicts:** Sex addicts experience a long list of painful consequences as a result of their destructive behaviors. Among studies of sex addicts: 40 percent report the loss of their partner or spouse, 70 percent report severe marital or relationship problems, 68 percent report exposure to AIDS and other STDs, 27 percent report loss of career, and 58 percent report legal consequences.<sup>40</sup>

**Effects on Family:** According to the NCSAC, spouses of sex addicts often experience: emotional problems; social embarrassment; physical abuse or unwanted touching in public and private; and sexual pressure to engage in degrading and unsafe sexual behaviors. In addition, some addicts lose sexual interest in their spouse.<sup>41</sup>

In a recent survey of 94 adult cybersex addicts conducted by sex addiction expert, Dr. Jennifer Schneider, a 34-year-old woman described how her husband's addiction to online pornography impacted their relationship: "He is unable to be intimate, he objectifies me, he objectifies women and girls on the street, (and) he fantasizes when we're together. I feel humiliated, used, and betrayed, as well as lied to and misled."<sup>42</sup>

The adverse effects experienced by children of cybersex addicts include: exposure to Internet porn, involvement in parental conflicts, parental neglect, and the breakup of their parents' marriage.<sup>43</sup>

### Sexual Violence

For some individuals, pornography consumption can escalate beyond sexual addiction into sexual violence. According to former FBI agent Roger Young, "...there is a direct correlation between pornography and violent sex crimes. Individuals who commit these crimes receive reinforcement, motivation, encouragement, and validation of their sexual fantasies from the pornography they view and read."<sup>44</sup>

Serial rapist and murderer Ted Bundy is one example of a sexual predator who was influenced by porn. In a 1989

interview before his execution, Bundy told Dr. James Dobson that his addiction to pornography had played a key role in his violent crimes. "I think people need to recognize that those of us who have been influenced by pornographic violence are not some kind of inherent monsters," Bundy warned. "We are your sons and we are your husbands...Any pornography can reach out and snatch a kid out of any house today."<sup>45</sup>

In the aforementioned paper commissioned by Surgeon General Koop, summarizing the research findings on the effects of exposure to pornography, Zillman also reported that prolonged consumption of non-violent and violent porn: "promotes insensitivity toward victims of sexual violence; trivializes rape and sexual child abuse as a criminal offense; and promotes men's belief of being capable of committing rape." In addition, men who "habitually" consume porn are at a greater risk of becoming sexually callous and sexually violent toward women.<sup>46</sup>

Studies of criminals have confirmed the link between porn and sexual violence. For example, a study of sex offenders by Dr. William Marshall, director of the Bath Institution's Sexual Offenders Program in Canada, found that 86 percent of serial rapists admitted to viewing hard-core porn, with 57 percent admitting that they had imitated scenes from pornographic material during their crimes.<sup>47</sup>

Pornography also puts children at risk for sexual abuse and is often used as a "training manual" by perpetrators.<sup>48</sup> According to the study by Dr. Marshall, 87 percent of adults who molest girls and 77 percent of adults who molest boys reported that they regularly used hard-core porn.<sup>49</sup>

An in-house study conducted by the Los Angeles Police Department's Administrative Vice Division over a 10-year period found that adult or child pornography was used in 60 percent of child molestation cases. Another study of 43 pedophiles found that child porn was used in every case.<sup>50</sup>

At a hearing in 2002, FBI Agent Michael J. Heimback of the Crimes Against Children Unit told the U.S. House Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism and Homeland Security that pedophiles use child porn to: demonstrate sex acts to their child victims; lower children's natural sexual inhibitions; desensitize them to sex; sexually arouse children; and groom children into a sexual relationship.<sup>51</sup>

Children who are sexually abused suffer physical, emotional, and psychological

trauma that lasts into adulthood, including a greater likelihood of becoming a sexual addict. This continues the cycle of destruction that often begins with porn.

## Conclusion

Pornography is not “harmless adult entertainment” as the porn industry claims. Inside the world of pornography, sex is public, no relationship is sacred, and no one’s body—not even a child’s—is innocent. True, not everyone who views porn will become a sexual addict or a sexual predator. The most pernicious effects of pornography are more subtle, and result from the powerful influence it exerts over the hearts, minds and souls of individuals, and in the damage it does to intimate relationships.

Men and women need each other, and society needs men and women to come together to form strong families based on mutual love, respect, trust and commitment in order to raise the next generation, who will be tomorrow’s husbands and wives, and fathers and mothers. By exploiting the natural sexual attraction between males and females, pornography chips away at these values and attacks the family in the place where it is the most vulnerable. There is nothing harmless about pornography in any form, and state and national lawmakers have a public duty to do all they can to protect families from the destructive effects of an industry that profits from the sexual exploitation of human beings.

---

*Alysse M. ElHage is a communications consultant with the North Carolina Family Policy Council.*

---

Copyright © 2004. North Carolina Family Policy Council. All Rights Reserved.

## Endnotes:

1. Hall, Laurie. *An Affair of the Mind: One Woman's Courageous Battle to Salvage Her Family From the Devastation of Pornography*. Colorado Springs: Focus on the Family, 1996, pg. 49.
2. LaRue, Jan. *Hard-Core Harm: Why You Can't Be Soft on Porn*, Concerned Women for America, 2004, pg. 2.
3. Ibid., pg. 2.
4. Ibid., Quoted in LaRue, pg. 3.

5. Ibid., pg. 2.
6. Ibid., pg. 5 (ref. to boys age 12-17)
7. PBS *Frontline*, “American Porn,” the Business, Playboy Magazine Demographics, 2/7/02. Also: PBS *Frontline*: “American Porn,” The Business, The Allure of Adult Content Users,” 2/7/02.
8. Collum, Jason. “Pornography: A Woman’s Struggle Too,” *Agape Press*, 3/9/04.
9. *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, 2004, www.webster.com.
10. U.S. Department of Justice, *Final Report of the Attorney General’s Commission on Pornography*, July 1986, v. 1 pgs. 228-9.
11. N.C.G.S. §14-190.10-15; Also: LaRue, Jan, “Pornography Definitions,” CWA, 5/15/03.
12. Obscenitycrimes.org, “A Quick Primer on Obscenity Laws and the First Amendment,” *Pornography and the First Amendment*; Also: Ibid. #2, pg. 2.
13. Ibid. See also: *Miller v. California*, 413 U.S. 15, 24-25 (1973).
14. National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, “What are Pornographic Images of Children,” Child Sexual Exploitation: Pornographic Images of Children, www.cybertipline.com.
15. Ibid.
16. PBS *Frontline*. “American Porn,” Do You Use Porn? A Survey from the Kinsey Institute, 2/7/02.
17. Ibid. #10, pg. 331.
18. Brooks, Gary R. “The Centerfold Syndrome.” Ronald F. Levant and Gary R. Brooks (Eds.), *Men and Sex: New Psychological Perspectives*. NY: John Wiley & Sons, 1997, pgs. 28-53.
19. Ibid., pg. 31.
20. Ibid., pg. 32.
21. Stock, Wendy E., “Sex as Commodity: Men and the Sex Industry,” Ronald F. Levant & Gary R. Brooks (Eds.), *Men and Sex: New Psychological Perspectives*, NY: John Wiley & Sons, 1997, pg. 117.
22. Ibid., #19 (Brooks), pg. 32.
23. Ibid. pgs. 33-34.
24. Ibid., pgs. 34.
25. Zillman, Dolf. “Effects of Prolonged Consumption of Pornography,” *Pornography: Research Advances and Policy Considerations*, Dolf Zillmann & Jennings Bryant (Eds.), NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Assoc., 1989, pgs. 153-154.
26. Bryant, Jennings & Dan Brown, “Uses of Pornography,” *Pornography: Research Advances and Policy Considerations*, Zillman and Bryant (Eds.), NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Assoc., 1989, pg. 45.
27. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, “Highlights of the Youth Internet Safety Survey,” Fact Sheet, March 2001.
28. Ibid. #2 (LaRue), pg. 5.
29. Ibid. #10, pg. 344.
30. Found in Stock, Ibid. #21, pg. 117.
31. Ibid. #26 (Bryant & Brown), pgs. 44-47.
32. Cline, Victor, Ph.D., “Pornography’s Effects on Adults and Children,” *The Porn Problem and Solutions*, ObscenityCrimes.org.
33. Goodenough, Patrick, “Online Porn Driving Sexually Aggressive Children,” *CNSNews.com*, 11/26/03.
34. Ibid. #32 (Cline).
35. Ibid. #32 (Cline).
36. Carnes, Patrick, *Don’t Call it Love*, New York: Bantam, 1991. Found in LaRue: Ibid. #2, pg. 5-6.
37. Laydon, Mary Anne, Ph.D., “If pornography made us healthy, we would be healthy by now,” *The Porn Problem and Solutions*, Morality in the Media: Obscenitycrimes.org, April 1999.
38. Schneider, Jennifer P., “A Qualitative Study of Cybersex Participants: Gender Differences, Recovery Issues, and Implications for Therapists,” *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*, v. 7 (2000), pgs. 249-278. At: www.jenniferschneider.com.
39. # of addicts: National Council on Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity (NCSAC), “Cybersex and Sexual Addiction,” Addicts/Seekers: Papers & Articles, www.ncsac.org. Also: Definition of cybersex: Ibid. #40 (Schneider).
40. Carnes, Patrick, “Sex Addiction Q&A,” Resources, www.SexHelp.com.
41. NCSAC, “Sexual Addiction: Family Impact and Family Treatment,” Addicts/Seekers: Papers & Articles, www.ncsac.org.
42. Schneider, Jennifer P. “Effects of Cybersex Addiction on the Family: Results of a Survey,” *Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity*, v. 7 (2000) pgs. 31-58. At: www.jenniferschneider.com.
43. Ibid.
44. Quoted in: Peters, Robert, “The Link Between Pornography and Violent Crimes,” *Morality in Media*, 3/24/04, pg. 16. See: www.obscuritycrimes.org.
45. Quoted in: McGeady, Paul J. “The Harmful Effects of Pornography,” *The Porn Problem and Solutions*, ObscenityCrimes.org, 9/22/00.
46. Ibid. #25 (Zillman), pgs. 153-155.
47. Found in LaRue, Ibid. #2, pg. 6.
48. Ibid. #32 (Cline).
49. Found in LaRue, Ibid. #2, pg. 6.
50. Found in Cline, Ibid. #32.
51. Heimback, Michael J., Crimes Against Children Unit, FBI, Testimony Before Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism and Homeland Security, Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. House, 5/1/02.

Organized in 1992, the North Carolina Family Policy Council is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, research and education organization. Our goal is to serve as a voice for families and traditional family values in the public policy arena. We are supported solely by private contributions which are tax deductible as provided by law. Our mailing address is P.O. Box 20607, Raleigh, NC 27619. Phone: (919) 807-0800. Fax: (919) 807-0900. Findings is a publication of the North Carolina Family Policy Council which is intended to communicate research findings and perspectives on public policy issues that affect the family. Nothing written here should be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of the North Carolina Family Policy Council or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress or the North Carolina General Assembly. Printed July 2004.