

ADDRESSING MISCONCEPTIONS: Pornography

There is ample evidence that mainstream pornography can have harmful effects. Standard pornography often depicts racist and intensely misogynistic imagery while at the same time eroticizing rape and other forms of violence against women. When the pornography industry connects masturbation material with eroticized racist portrayals, extreme acts of violence, verbal degradation and the sexualizing of children, the results can be dangerous for women, children and the men consuming the hateful messages and imagery.

Misconception:

Pornography is just about sex.

REALITY:

Pornography is about money and using sex to make a profit – a very large profit. The pornography industry is a global business that capitalizes on distorting sexuality into a marketable product. In 2005, 13,585 hardcore pornographic video/DVD titles were released in the United States, up from 1,300 titles in 1988. (Compare this number to the 559 mainstream movies Hollywood released in 2005.) In 2006, worldwide pornography revenue was estimated to be \$97.06 billion, with \$13.3 billion of that being generated in the United States alone.¹

Misconception:

Pornography displays ordinary fantasies that all men have.

REALITY:

Research has found that readily available, “common” pornography² thrives on displaying and normalizing sexual behavior that is harmful and abusive to women. It depicts women as subservient and, in turn, creates and supports a culture of male dominance. A 2008 study of the 100 most rented pornographic movies found that all films shared similar depictions: “Verbal and physical aggression was common, women were the primary targets of aggression, and negative responses to aggression were extremely rare.”³

Even if this reflected the “ordinary” fantasies of men, these behaviors and attitudes should not be encouraged. As stated by Professor Robert Jensen, researcher and activist in the movement against sexual exploitation, “Even if one could demonstrate that men’s aggressive sexual behavior was hard-wired and inevitable, so what? If such behavior has consequences that violate our most fundamental sense of justice, would we still not want to do everything we could to prevent it? Would we not in fact work especially hard to overcome that unfortunate reality of our evolutionary history?”⁴

¹ Internet Filter Review. *Internet pornography statistics*. Retrieved September 10, 2009, from <http://internet-filter-review.toptenreviews.com/internet-pornography-statistics.html>

² Researchers often refer to non-violent dehumanizing pornography as “standard-fare” or “common” hard-core pornography due to its predominance within the pornography business. As stated by one researcher, this type of pornography is characterized by the portrayal of women as “socially non-discriminating, as hysterically euphoric in response to just about any sexual or pseudosexual stimulation, and as eager to accommodate any and every sexual request.” Zillman, D. & Bryant, J. (1984). Effects of massive exposure to pornography. In N.M. Malamuth & E. Donnerstein (Eds.), *Pornography and sexual aggression* (p. 134). Orlando, FL: Academic Press, as quoted in Watson, B. & Welch, S.R. (2000). *Just harmless fun?* Retrieved September 3, 2009, from Enough is Enough, Protect Kids Web site: <http://www.protectkids.com/effects/justharmlessfun.pdf>

³ Sun, S., Bridges, A., Wosnitzer, R., Scharrer, E., & Liberman, R. (2008). A comparison of male and female directors in popular pornography: What happens when women are at the helm? *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 32, 312-325.

⁴ Jensen, R. (2007). *Getting off: Pornography and the end of masculinity*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.



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Misconception:

Just because a man watches or looks at pornography, it does not mean that he will be affected by it or will actually imitate these pornographic acts.

REALITY:

Research has shown that repeatedly using pornography affects men's behavior and willingness to engage in certain activities. One 1994 study found that men exposed to violent pornography were six times more likely to exhibit rape behavior,⁵ and a second one in 1995 found pornography use was the strongest correlate of sexual aggression.⁶ A 1989 review of a series of studies of common pornography found that its consumption led to insensitivity toward victims of sexual violence, trivialization of rape as a criminal offense, trivialization of sexual child abuse as a criminal offense, increased belief that lack of sexual activity leads to health risks, and increased acceptance of pre- and extra-marital sexuality. The study noted that "habitual male consumers of common pornography appear to be at greater risk of becoming sexually callous" toward female sexuality and concerns.⁷

Misconception:

All women who perform in pornographic movies or pose for pornographic photos choose this work, and performing in pornographic movies is a lucrative career option for women.

REALITY:

Many women and children are forced to work in pornography. There is no way to guarantee that the pornography you are viewing was done willingly and consensually. Both the U.S. Department of Justice and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children have recognized that pornography adds to the serious problem of sex trafficking. Many traffickers are found with filming equipment and cameras with the intent to create and sell pornography.⁸

Additionally, when a woman in a pornographic movie or picture is shown having acts of violence perpetrated against her (e.g., being penetrated by an object), she is actually experiencing those acts. It's not just a fantasy. Real women are harmed in the production of pornography. As noted by Sheila Jeffreys, associate professor of political science at the University of Melbourne: "When people discuss pornography, what they forget is that they are watching the abuse of women. Do you know how long it takes to make one of these apparently non-violent films? It can take 12 hours. Women have to take double and triple penetration, they take pain killers and muscle relaxants, drugs, alcohol to disassociate, to help them cope. So what you are watching is not pornography. It is the abuse and prostitution of women."⁹

⁵ Boeringer, S.B. (1994). Pornography and sexual aggression: Associations of violent and nonviolent depictions with rape and rape proclivity. *Deviant Behavior*, 15, 289-304.

⁶ Crossman, L. (1995). *Date rape and sexual aggression by college males: Incidence and the involvement of impulsivity, anger, hostility, psychopathology, peer influence and pornography use*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX.

⁷ Zillman, D. (1989). Effects of prolonged consumption of pornography. In Zillman, D. & Bryant, J. (Eds.), *Pornography: Research advances and policy considerations* (p. 155). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum. Quoted in Watson, B. & Welch, S.R. (2000). *Just harmless fun?* Retrieved September 3, 2009, from Enough is Enough, Protect Kids Web site: <http://www.protectkids.com/effects/justharmlessfun.pdf>

⁸ McGinnis, E. *The horrifying reality of sex trafficking*. Retrieved June 13, 2008, from <http://www.beverlylahayeinstitute.org>

⁹ Overington, C. (2007, February 28). Porn at X-roads. *Australian IT*. Retrieved July 29, 2009, from <http://www.australianit.news.com.au/story/0,24897,21299567-15841,00.html>