



Special Report on Pornography

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The fact that pornography is the third biggest money-maker for organized crime in the United States -- next only to drugs and gambling -- is not the kind of thing that the average Filipino would be concerned about. The fact that there is a statistical correlation between the availability of pornography and the rape rate in states across America, would still sound alien to many Filipinos since the nation concerned is halfway around the world. But when elementary school boys in Manila start sexually assaulting girls of the same age and even younger, then confess they were imitating scenes from magazines and video, it may be an indication that it's time for people on this side of the planet to be concerned and do something to combat the ills that pornography will continue to bring to society if left unchecked.

The problem

What is pornography? Literal translation from Greek: "writing of harlots" from *porne* ("harlot") + *graphein* ("to write"). It is the depiction of erotic or obscene behavior in printed, graphic or electronic media, intended to cause lustful excitement. It reduces the person to a sex object, degrading both pornographic subject and spectator.

Pornographic material used to be limited to printed literature, with magazines and "adult" comic books being made available on the market, followed by video. With the progress in information technology over the past decade, smut has become easily available on the Internet, with corporations like Playboy and other porno-pushers cashing in on the opportunity to widen its market. Today, this branch of organized crime makes \$8-10 billion per year in the U.S. alone.

Despite laws that prohibit the sale of such materials and which serve as guidelines on what may and may not be printed and aired on mass media, the problem persists. Law enforcement needs to be improved, and the parameters of such words as "obscenity," "art," "self-regulation," "decency" and "maturity" are yet to be clearly defined before media can really be cleaned up. Meanwhile, a mass media industry goes about its business on fairly loose guidelines, judging from the products of print and broadcast media, as well as those of cinema. In the middle of all this, children -- the most vulnerable members of any society -- are the unwitting recipients of whatever they are exposed to. The youth, too, are among the heaviest users of mass media, which would be of no consequence had rules on age verification and age limit as regards media consumption been strictly enforced in the Philippines. The current situation concerning the accessibility of pornographic materials, and the lack of agreement between different sectors on how to deal with the problem, only underscore one basic premise on the growth and development of young people: it is up to families to protect their children from external threats, with parents as the primary educators of their children.

Where is the proof of harm?

Preoccupation with "dirty magazines" or x-rated films during pre-teenage and teenage years has come to be regarded as an ordinary stage in a man's life, a legitimate way of satisfying his curiosity and learning about the facts of life. As a result, parental concern over this matter has been confined mostly to light words of admonition or even a complete disregard of the issue when the dirt surfaces on the VCR or from under the mattress. To date, human

sexuality is still a matter that most parents are unable to thoroughly discuss with their children. On the other end of the spectrum is a situation where smut is strictly forbidden in a house with no explanations given for these restrictions.

Notwithstanding the rules that families enforce in their households, porn continues to be produced and consumed on the basis of two important factors: First, the natural tendency in everyone to initially rebel against the idea of external elements (the government, the Church, the school, current norms) determining what one can or cannot read in the privacy of his own home. It is seen as a violation of one's privacy and a curtailment of his rights. What is overlooked, however, is that while human rights ought to be protected and upheld at all times, some activities are prohibited because besides the fact that their being carried out cannot be considered a human right, these do damage to individuals and society. Second, the defense used by its proponents that porn is a "victimless crime." Based on countless researches done over years involving men, women and children, it has been established that porn has many victims. First and foremost among them are children.

Children

Children, primarily boys between 12 and 17 years of age, have been found to have a greater level of smut exposure than do adults, according to a report released by the U.S. Attorney General's Commission on Pornography in 1986. The consequences of childhood exposure to hard-core porn can be seen in newspaper headlines like the following:

"Boy in rape case: Imitating video/10-year-old is held in detention home"

"Boy, 11, Who Raped 5-Year-Old Says He Copied Cable TV"

The Philippines has a different scenario. While parental supervision is given more attention in Filipino homes compared to those in Western countries, children are not spared from the effects of repeated exposure to porn, largely due to relaxed official policies and societal standards. Two separate incidents indicate the kind of reaction that exposure to erotic and obscene materials can elicit, even in minors:

In Santa Mesa, Manila, police arrested five boys, aged 9 to 13, for raping a 7-year-old girl.

In Nueva Ecija, a 13-year-old boy raped a 6-year-old girl.

In both cases, a common element was pornography. After being apprehended, the Santa Mesa boys confessed that pornographic comic books available on newsstands in the vicinity replaced children's games, which became boring after they got into the habit of reading such materials. The Nueva Ecija boy stated that he had seen a movie that featured couples engaged in lovemaking and felt like doing it to the six-year-old, who was a neighbor.

In addition to being exposed through mass media, children are victimized by adults who use porn. Pedophilia was rampant in the Pagsanjan, Laguna, area sometime in the '80s until the problem was eradicated by deporting and/or putting the offenders in jail. (Child molestation, however, continues to occur based on cases reported to the police in various parts of the country.) No single characteristic of pedophilia is more pervasive than obsession with child porn. With the arrest of each suspected pedophile in the Pagsanjan area, files of photographs of naked boys were unearthed in the adult's abode. Let the statistics drawn up from years of study speak for themselves: 87% of molesters of girls and 77% of molesters of boys who were studied in Canada admitted to regular use of hard-core porn. In a 10-year study, the Sexually Exploited Child Unit of the Los Angeles Police Department, U.S.A., found that adult and child porn was reportedly used in over 60% of the child molestation cases.

Women

Women are victims of porn because they are depicted as objects to be used, abused and discarded. In fact, with all sex offenders, pornography epitomizes the objectification of women which, in turn, hastens the depersonalization process common to sexual aggressiveness. Men, in other words, are numbed to the humanity of women since female persons are depicted not so much as human beings but as things that are a means to physical pleasure; further, exposure to pornography increases male acceptance of the "rape

myth" -- that all women desire to be raped. Again, experience in law enforcement and counseling here and abroad over long periods of time indicate the correlation between the availability of porn and crime rate, crimes that include sexual offenses: A man in Caloocan attacked a girl he chanced upon on his way home. When apprehended, he admitted that he had been sexually aroused after seeing an erotic movie. Going home, he saw the girl in a dark alley. A man from Bulacan convicted for the rape and murder of a college sophomore, was found to have inhabited a room filled with magazines and newspapers containing sexually loaded pictures and stories. Elsewhere, a Michigan state police study of 38,000 rapes concluded that porn was used prior to or during the commission of the rape in 41% of all sexual assault cases. In Oklahoma County, 162 out of 172 sex businesses were closed between 1984 and 1989. According to District Attorney Bob Macy and Police Chief Bob Wilder, rapes declined by 27% during that period within Oklahoma County. In the rest of the state, rapes increased by 19%. An Ohio study revealed that the rate of rape and robbery is two to seven times higher in areas where outlets of porn and other sexually oriented businesses are located. The findings of an Arizona study likewise indicated that more sexual offenses are committed in neighborhoods where porn businesses are located.

The women who "perform" in hard-core porn are also victims: many are drug abusers, runaways, victims of physical and sexual abuse, who are exposed to remarkable health risks and whose circumstances are taken advantage of by the proponents of this branch of organized crime. Needless to say, among the hardest-hit victims of smut are women -- in their violated sense of dignity, and in their lost security and privacy.

Men

Men are victims in a different sense. Pornography is a form of sexual addiction that can lead men into violent acts they would otherwise not have contemplated. But perhaps the most striking consequence of exposure to smut in men is the decreased sexual satisfaction within marriage. Tita Reverente, Executive Director of Philippine Alliance Against Pornography (PAAP) and Stop Trafficking of Pilipinos Foundation (STOP), who has been engaged in the anti-smut campaign for years, relates the experience of a friend who discovered that her husband of 25 years had been "fooling around" half the time. The husband decided to let go of the other woman "who had come to be a permanent fixture in his life, because he would take her along on (business) trips," said Reverente. "When the wife was (trying to understand the affair) and asked her husband what had happened, he said 'maybe it's because of all the sex magazines that I read.'"

While not all men are equally vulnerable to habitual porn use, psychologists identify the four stages of viewing pornography following the initial exposure, and how the process can lead to a man's tendency toward violent behavior:

Addiction - Gets hooked on porn and craves for more

Escalation - Needs more explicit, deviant images; actively seeks more stimulating material

Desensitization - Offensiveness of lewd materials wears off; material initially viewed as shocking or taboo is seen as acceptable

Acting out - Desires to perform what is viewed, with a willing or unwilling partner

As can be concluded from the facts, pornography is in no way a "victimless crime." All around us are the victims: in a child's lost innocence, in a woman's lost security and privacy, and in a man's lost self-control.

The present situation

Here is one actual scenario in a Manila household: two elementary school children arrive home from school shortly before noon, take their lunch in front of the TV set accompanied by the househelper, tune in to Magandang Tanghali Bayan (MTB) in time for the Calendar Girl contest, watch until they lose interest, follow the same routine from Monday to Friday. Both parents hold down professional jobs and only recently found out about the children's viewing habits and are presently trying to moderate TV consumption at their home.

This scenario points out two factors that are at the core of the problem of pornography: the content of mass media (which, to a certain degree, determines societal standards), and the degree of vulnerability of the public.

Content of mass media

In the late 1980s, social analysts expressed the theory that movies serve a special purpose particularly during times of social and political instability: that of providing entertainment for the people so as to help distract them from the uncertainty of the times. Case in point: the onslaught of sensually provocative (dubbed "ST" for "sex trip") flicks and the inadvertent popularity of "ST" actresses around the time of coup d'etats against the Aquino government, of the Mt. Pinatubo eruption, and of the Tiananmen Square events. Henceforth, a variety of local and foreign "titillating" materials have been carried by movie theaters, with optimum advertisement by way of giant billboards along major thoroughfares. For the past several years, female bold actresses have enjoyed the spotlight, with the help of exposure provided by talk shows, variety shows, situation comedies and entertainment write-ups. A survey of the entertainment pages of daily broadsheets also indicates that since the present officers and members of the Movie & Television Review and Classification Board (MTRCB) assumed office in July 1998, there has been an increase in the production and distribution of movies with sexual content and themes.

Amid all this, there is television that offers a mix of imported and locally produced programs -- interspersed with commercial advertisements -- a good number of them tainted with a similar treatment of sexuality which characterizes the current state of the film industry. These can be gleaned from programs like Baywatch, Sunset Beach, MTV and Melrose Place, and even local noontime shows that have attracted both appreciation and criticism by way of beauty contests that have bikini-clad women parading and performing before cameras on a daily basis. When cable TV came in, as many as 70 additional channels entered households that hooked up. Add to this the rapid developments in computer technology, which not only opened up a whole new way of life through sophisticated software and hardware, but literally provided -- and continues to provide -- easier access to previously unreachable territories, via the Internet. How easy? Virtually anything you want at the click of a mouse.

Vulnerability

The sexual content of mass media, and the intensity with which these words and images are exposed to the consumer, are only one side of the issue. The other vital component in the impact that pornography makes is the degree of vulnerability of the consumers in society.

"If an individual is better molded, he won't be so easily affected by exposure to external things, like the media. The process is usually the interaction of a so-called internal structure, and external factors," states Dr. F.G. David, a bio-psychologist and former chairman of the University of the Philippines Department of Psychology in Diliman. He stresses the crucial role that family plays in an individual's upbringing and explains why present lifestyles put today's children at a disadvantage.

"In the old days, the father and mother worked nearby, if they are farmers and the farm is near the home. Anytime, the parents can keep an eye on the children...puwedeng makauwi o makaka-merienda. Nowadays, if you live in Fairview and your work is in Makati, it's not only far, but travel time is longer due to traffic. What more if your means of livelihood is in Australia, in the Middle East, in Europe or anywhere else in the world? Paminsan-minsan ka lang uuwi. The result is a family bond that is loosened and therefore, the children are left alone to fend for themselves, including their moral education."

Dr. David also alludes to the role of grandparents in inculcating a solid formation in children, but points out that if a family lives in the city, bringing the grandparents over from the province would be difficult, "especially since apartments here usually have no yards, and that is important if the grandparents grew up in the province."

"Also consider the fact that except for third world countries like the Philippines, religion as a formal institution is giving way," he adds. "Mahina na rin ang hawak ng church sa buhay ng tao except in third world countries. In more developed countries...perhaps it's more the rule for people to be atheists than believers. There's the loosened family bond, so the general

structure, as it were, is already vulnerable. Thus, any external factor, let's say the media, can really derail a family. Now, with a loosened family bond coupled with the weakening of the church, what you have is a body with minimized resistance or immunity. If the media is now a virus, it can easily attack. Well, if it's a good virus, it's alright but if it's a bad one, the kind of internal structure that is already breaking apart can be easily demolished."

Efforts being made

"Of course, there may be a single genius in society who can sway a lot. But even that genius thrives on the shoulders of men, the spirit of society. So it goes back...to the entire society. But society changes slowly. It is in a constant evolution..." stated Dr. David. Indeed, if events in the course of history are to be the basis, changes in society are ultimately effected not by the work of one person but by the vigilance and the concerted efforts of many -- and over a long period of time. As for the issue of pornography, those who regard it as an offense to people's sensibilities and an affront on decency are busy at work.

Legislation. Some lawmakers are doing their part, with the Anti-Obscenity and Anti-Pornography Act of 1998 -- or House Bill 2135 -- under consideration in Congress. The bill, penned by Rep. Michael Defensor (Quezon City, 3rd District), seeks to make amendments in the Revised Penal Code to, among other things, prohibit the publication, sale, distribution, importation and exhibition of pornographic materials, and the performance of lewd shows in public places. It also recommends stiffer penalties for violators. "The bill is not a priority at the moment because the House considers others -- political or economic bills -- more urgent. And many others were filed ahead of House Bill 2135. But if the public shows enough interest in the pursuit of the bill, that will help in getting it on the floor," says one of Rep. Defensor's staff. House Bill 2135 likewise has a Senate counterpart in Senate Bill 1014, authored by Sen. Loren Legarda -Leviste, which seeks to establish a comprehensive anti-obscenity and pornography law once and for all.

PAAP and STOP. Both conglomerations of various organizations, they continue to do advocacy work to advance the cause of women's and children's rights. These include education, legal assistance, rehabilitation and skills training for victims of sexual exploitation; youth campaigns and inter-school movements against porn. For several years, members and officers joined with other sectors in their A.P.O.Y. activities: Anti-Pornography and Obscenity Year-round symposia and burning activities, which saw the repeated burning of collected piles of smut materials.

Men Against Pornography (MAP). Men Against Pornography is a group of men in New York City who want to help create sexual justice and who believe that porn stands in the way of it. Since its inception in 1984, the organization has assisted men in dealing with and overcoming problems brought on by porn use, through workshops, counseling, and "Quitting Pornography", an online page containing personal stories of success in battling the effects of this problem. One of its protests is aimed at Time-Warner, the entertainment company which publishes magazines including Sports Illustrated -- which are all circulated worldwide -- and which came out with Sex, Madonna's much talked about book. The group drew up a list of "Top 10 Ways Sports Illustrated Disrespects Women" to awaken people to the harmful elements of the magazine. Excerpts from the protest:

1. The Sports Illustrated swimsuit issue DISRESPECTS women by directly contradicting Time-Warner's corporate hype, which claims the magazine stands for serious sports journalism and respects the ability and dignity of women and girls in athletics. ...
5. The Sports Illustrated swimsuit issue DISRESPECTS women by imitating an idea of women that originates in pornography. Mimicking magazines like Playboy and Penthouse, Sports Illustrated spreads out women's bodies on the page for male "readers" to ogle at. ...
7. Sports Illustrated DISRESPECTS women by photographing their bodies as if they are merely body parts -- breasts, buttocks, and crotches. ...
8. Sports Illustrated DISRESPECTS women by displaying demeaning stereotypes of female sexuality. The swimsuit issue features women models posed not as athletes of strength, skill, and endurance but as playthings -- in costumes no one could possibly swim in competitively.

Besides conducting workshops and initiating public protests, MAP has joined forces with other groups like the National Coalition Against Sexual Assault, Men's Rape Prevention Project, Inc., and Emerge: A Men's Counseling Service on Domestic Violence, Inc., in pushing for justice in legal cases involving sexual exploitation.

What you can do

People like Tita Reverente are simply ordinary people who see a need and get into action. In her case, it was a glimpse into a tabloid column, then concern for the welfare of impressionable minds, and a desire to stop the dirt. "I want to conscientize people, to awaken parents to their responsibility that values and morality are not given by the Church or the State. We are the Church and we are the government, and the children will learn from their parents. Parents have to start being the good example of their children."

Public opinion has also been known to influence advertising decisions, editorial contents of newspapers and magazines, and legislation. Giant billboards of underwear and jeans products along Edsa in Mandaluyong, and Quirino Avenue in Manila, were torn down due to the persistence of a group of housewives who aired their protests through telephone calls to the mayor's office and letters addressed to the advertiser. "I found those underwear ads so offensive; parang nakahubad na talaga sila at wala nang tinago! I don't think it's proper to display that in public at all," says Katherine, one of the women who wrote the garment manufacturing company about changing its ad campaign. "I was so happy when the billboard was removed several months before the contract expired. I guess they were pressured!"

Even a local chain of bookstores recalled one of the books on its shelves when a consumer pointed out the pornographic nature of its content. "I made an appointment with one of the owners and showed her this book that taught techniques in making homosexual activity more exciting -- complete with photos! It was pornography already, and she was shocked! I don't think they get to check the contents of everything they sell in the bookstore. But she banned this one," relates Manolo, who has been keeping an eye out for other pornographic materials being circulated in the mainstream by scrupulous promoters henceforth.

Based on what Dr. David has said about the crucial role of the family in preparing individuals for society's challenges, the responsibility of making sure that children are formed well rests primarily on their parents. For this, their presence is necessary. If one is not keen on giving advertisers a piece of their mind, or attending public hearings on legislative discussions, the place to do his part in dealing with the current problem of pornography is the home, where, as Tita Reverente said, they are to provide the good example for their children.

Link: <http://simbahayan.tripod.com/B5-pornography01.html>

Ref.: http://www.teenfad.ph/beintheknow_content.php?id=69