

~~CENSORED~~

NATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR THE REFORM OF THE OBSCENE PUBLICATIONS ACTS

N C R O P A

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The N.C.R.O.P.A. is affiliated to the National Council for Civil Liberties

NO/DAW/DP

28th September 1989

Ms. Diane Core,
Director,
"Childwatch",
60 Beck Road,
Everthorpe,
South Cave,
North Humberside.

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I watched your contribution to "The James Whale Radio Show" discussion on "pornography" on ITV last Friday night with great interest but virtual total disagreement.

You made a number of factually inaccurate and irrational claims which need to be challenged and presented arguments which need to be demolished.

You claimed that "research" in the U.S.A. had shown that the vast majority of child sexual abusers possessed large quantities of "pornography" and therefore that this was a clear indication that "pornography" was the cause, the instigator of this abuse. Such irrational nonsense is typical of the spurious kind of so-called "research" bandied about by the anti-sex lobby, but which is incapable of withstanding serious academic scrutiny and being tested by accredited, independent scientific scholars of true integrity.

Any researcher of real worth will tell you of the fallaciousness of deducing that, because one set of circumstances occurs at the same time as another set of circumstances, then the one set is the cause of the other. The question that needs to be asked is cause or effect - or irrelevance? There is as much logic in your argument as in believing that because boxes of matches are found in an arsonist's home, the availability of matches is to blame for the arsonist's attacks and therefore that all matches should be banned.

Of course child sexual abuse cannot be condoned, because there has to be obvious coercion involved. A child is simply not sufficiently mature enough to be able to make a conscious decision as to whether or not he or she should participate in sexual activity. However, where consenting adults are concerned (and that means when they are no longer children, but sexually mature beings) society does not have the right to proscribe sexual activity, in all its varied and delightful forms, (including homosexual activity) except where incontrovertible evidence can be produced that it causes proven harm.

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You were clearly deeply puzzled by the acknowledged enthusiastic interest that so many of us have in so-called "pornography". I am deeply puzzled by such wide-eyed naivety. Sex, and the pursuit of same, is a perfectly natural, instinctive, human phenomenon. Sexual appetite is no less a primitive driving force than nutritional appetite. Nobody demands the censorship of cookery books because they pander to one's instinctive appetite for food - not even when some people develop compulsive eating habits and become grotesquely (and harmfully!) obese. Why, then, should anybody demand the censorship of sex books which pander to one's instinctive appetite for sex?

The question that must be frankly answered - but rarely is, I grant you - is 'what do the purchasers of "pornography" use it for when they've got it?' (Incidentally, the N.C.R.O.P.A. prefers not to use that description, viz "pornography", which is applied so indiscriminately and inaccurately to so many different kinds of sexual material, and which, in any case, has no meaning in British law. We simply refer to 'sexually explicit material'). Most use it as a stimulus to heightened sexual arousal, then they masturbate and produce an orgasm. Their innate sexual appetite (especially voracious in youthful years) is thereby appeased and no harm has been done to anyone. Indeed, quite the reverse. It has afforded them the ecstatic pleasure of sexual gratification when an obviously preferable real, mutually suitable and consenting sexual partner is not available. And remember, women use "pornography" as well as men.

The safety-valve device "pornography" thus provides is completely harmless, but there is also a highly credible case to be made for its value in possibly averting potential sexual attacks on unwilling, random victims by the anti-social, hyper-frustrated, inadequate or disturbed - often those unhappy members of our society who, through a mere accident of birth, are unlovely, unloved or merely unlucky, or are completely and cruelly deprived of any other sexual outlet because of incapacitation, disablement or disfigurement. Don't you think such people are just as much in need of a little consideration and human compassion as society's deprived and abused children?

Masturbation is, unfortunately, the last great taboo subject. Most of us, at some time or other, masturbate. No-one is pretending that it is preferable to the unmatched joys of a climaxing orgasm shared with a loving and participating partner. I am very happy for those who are lucky enough to have found such ideal bliss, but, regrettably, for most, life is not so accommodating. Our difficulty is that most people are extremely secretive about their sex lives and particularly about their masturbatory habits. It is certainly true of males that admission to regular indulgence in the practice will be regarded as an acknowledgement of lack of sexual success, of sexual attractiveness and thus will reveal sexual failure. Females are even less forthcoming about their solo sexual activities. This is a great pity because there is no doubt that the practice is rife, should be expected to be rife and will continue to be rife. However the secrecy surrounding it presents a dishonest picture. There is certainly no shame attached to it, and neither should there be to a natural interest in material - "pornography" if you must - which assists and enhances its fulfilment.

Even in last Saturday's "Guardian" there appeared a full-page advertisement for Martin Amis's new novel which carries the proclamation "Today in London the Average Man Will Think About Sex 20 Times. One Man in Three Will Masturbate". The reliable source for this information is the Institute of Sex Education & Research I checked with both the novel's publishers, Jonathan Cape, and their advertising

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agents.

Interestingly^{ly} enough, the 'ad' also uses two other London statistics - "A Woman Will Be Sexually Assaulted Every Three Hours" and "Five Children Will Die From Parental Abuse Within The Week". Now it might be, it just might be, that, if we could increase the number of masturbators in our society, we might be able to reduce the number of women who will be sexually assaulted and the number of children who will suffer sexual abuse - and it might be, it just might be, that the decriminalising of sexually explicit material and permitting its lawful publication in this presently censor-obsessed country, might play a very important part in bringing that about. It certainly seems to have done so in most other so-called 'free' Western World countries, who have long since dispensed with the draconian and repressive censorship restrictions we are still, alone, saddled with in this country.

Another claim you made was that the 'consumption' of "pornography" was addictive and, furthermore, that its regular use diminished its earlier impact which, in turn, led to a craving for more extreme and perverse forms of material. You likened it, I believe, to the graduation of 'soft' drugs users to 'hard' drugs. Yet again, there is, ^{not} and has never been, any substantiated evidence that this is so. It is an emotive view, a blind assumption, on the part of those who, for various reasons, mainly political or religious, wish to discredit and prohibit sexual material. In any case, it is a nonsense to describe the viewing of sexually explicit material as "addictive" when sex itself, as I've already stated, is, in effect, a natural addiction. A diminution of interest in sex and thus in sexual material also, is surely the unnatural thing.

It is mischievous and improper of you to endeavour to equate the consumption of drugs with the consumption of "pornography". They are totally different - one of proven, even lethal, harm, the other harmless and often positively helpful.

Finally you said that the Home Office refuses to carry out any research into the effects of "pornography". That, too, is nonsense, since in 1977 the Home Office set up the Committee on Obscenity and Film Censorship. It was appointed by the then Home Secretary, Merlyn Rees, and deliberated for two years, reporting its findings to Parliament, through the new Home Secretary, William Whitelaw, in November 1979.

This distinguished Committee's findings (it was chaired by Professor Bernard Williams, then Provost of King's College Cambridge) were unanimous. They found no evidence of harm in sexually explicit material and, with several minor reservations, recommended that it should be made freely available to consenting adults. Ten years have elapsed since without any action being taken to implement these recommendations, which is a national disgrace.

However the Williams Committee were not alone. All the major, really credible investigations on the subject throughout the world have reached the same conclusion. What is required is not more investigations, committees, enquiries, but positive Government action to implement what has already been revealed, what nearly all other Western World Governments have long since acted upon, and what should be ours, as of right, namely the freedom to choose for ourselves what we see, read and hear. Censorship is the real obscenity, and freedom from it is an essential ingredient of any 'free society'.

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Emotive and illogical responses to an avowedly serious problem like child abuse are no help and certainly no solution, and in citing "pornography" as the root cause of a much more deep-seated and highly complex matter, you are quite unjustifiably dubbing it society's scapegoat. I do hope that the points I have made in this letter will motivate you to re-appraise and revise your approach, because I do believe it is the wrong one. I do, however, of course wish you and "Childwatch" well.

Yours sincerely,

David Webb,
Honorary Director,
National Campaign for the Reform of the Obscene Publications Acts

Copies to: Mr. James Whale, Presenter "The James Whale Radio Show"
Mr. Ian Bolt, Executive Producer "The James Whale Radio Show"