

Pornography and Violence

Richard Read argues that case studies reveal a link between pornography and violent sex crimes

The last two decades have seen a significant shift in the nature of sexual offences committed. In the late 1960s and early 1970s rape usually involved an indecent assault accompanied by vaginal intercourse. Today, if a woman is raped it is commonplace to hear that she has suffered a combination of assaults including touching her genitals, insertion of objects such as beer bottles into her vagina or anus and the insertion of a penis in her mouth. Other degrading acts such as forced oral contact with her attacker's anus are not uncommon. Not infrequently she will be raped in this fashion by a number of males at the same time.

With the increase in violent crime generally and the change in the way sex crimes are committed, there is a compelling need to find out how much of this violent crime is being caused by depicted violence and pornography in the print, cinema and electronic media.

The broad community acceptance that advertising influences human behaviour is to some extent reflected in the enormous amount of money generated by advertising that seeks to influence the habits and choices of consumers. This, coupled with the free availability of pornographic material at newsagents, service stations and video shops, has led me to consider the impact depicted violence has on the actions of individuals.

Anti-social behaviour

The sexual and aggressive drives are strong in males, and conditioning from childhood is intended to restrain male expression in socially acceptable ways. It is likely that if a male child, or young adult with poor impulse control, views this material he is likely not only to become sexually aroused, but also to lose control over those mechanisms which inhibit anti-social behaviour in normal people. He is likely, if opportunity presents itself, to imitate the violence or sexual activity he saw in the film or in the magazine. He will not know that the women he saw engaging in such acts as oral sex were in fact being paid, blackmailed or forced to perform those acts. He may also assume that such conduct is the norm and accepted generally by women.

Constant exposure to violent or explicit sexual material, whether on video, cinema, television or in magazines is not only detrimental to young people, but in some cases will be the trigger factor which leads them to commit a crime of violence. This material is capable of moulding the young mind and teaching that person all he needs to know to commit a violent crime, providing him with the knowledge he might not otherwise have had. It can have the same effect on an adult with poor judgment and poor impulse control. It can turn fantasy into reality with those who cannot or are unable to differentiate between reality and fiction.

Case studies

I have located some files in the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions in Victoria which support my assessment of the situation. My "exploratory study" was designed to obtain relevant factual information and identify questions as a starting point for further research into actual case histories, an aspect which has received very little attention in Australia. My research is designed to encourage more detailed research by others, and no question of any statistical inferences can arise. I shall confine my comments to actual case studies which provide compelling evidence of the link.

Case study 1

In my opinion, the first case is a graphic example of the serious problem which our community faces as a result of hard core pornographic material being made freely available since the early 1970s.

This case involves the abduction at knife point of a woman, who was bound with a rope and placed in the boot of a vehicle and driven to a deserted reserve outside Melbourne. The woman was violently sexually assaulted, and sustained extensive bruising, abrasions and cuts, some cuts being 8 inches long.

When arrested and interviewed by the police, the offender explained his strong sexual drive and why he took the rope and the knife with him that night:

"Because I have been reading books on bondage and I felt a strong urge to act out what was in the books. I knew it

was wrong, but I couldn't help myself." When asked why he had cut one of the woman's nipples off, he replied:

"It's those bondage books, sex feeds on sex, that's what has done it, you sort of get an insatiable appetite. You read in those books where women liked to be tied up and spanked, and at the time you know it's serious, but you don't think you are doing wrong. The books show women need to be dominated, and that to grab a woman off the street and tie her up and rape her isn't really wrong, and as I said to (her) that night that I had to do it once to get it out of my system you know..."

The police showed him some drawings that they had seized from his house and he admitted making those drawings. The drawings depict cutting off a breast, removal of a nipple and other sexual activities. He also agreed that photographs that were seized showed a knife on a woman on similar positions to those forced upon his victim. He then said:

"I realise that I have been doing the wrong things by reading bondage books because they have been putting ideas into my head."

He gave a very interesting description of these events when he said:

"This incident became a terrible nightmare instead of a fantasy come true"

The court was told that a large number of books and magazines on sex were found in his bungalow. They included "Robbed and Raped", "Bondage Love" and "Kidnapped".

His Counsel described "Bondage Love" as being "almost a blueprint of what actually occurred."

The psychological evidence established that this offender had poor judgment and poor control of his sexual instincts.

A forensic psychologist said it was his opinion that:

"Something was going to happen at this particular point in time regardless, you know. It seems to me that he had the blueprint for this behaviour. He didn't have to make up anything from his own resources and he just went ahead and followed them. I think that is the learning phenomenon that occurred, and in the natural course of events something was going to occur in any case I felt at this particular time."

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Mr Justice McGarvie said that what this offender did followed fairly closely a story written in one of the magazines found by police. In sentencing, his Honour said:

"He (counsel) has drawn my attention to the number of bondage books or bondage magazines which were in your possession, and I have looked at a number of them and read several of them. It is a despicable thing that people in this community make profit by carrying on such an evil trade as the sale of those magazines. The message which is strongly made in those magazines is that it is socially acceptable for a man to engage sexually in cruel, degrading and humiliating conduct towards women. Indeed the books convey the impression that women like to be dominated and cruelly treated in their sexual relations."

Case study 2

A case heard in the Children's Court at Melbourne in 1987 demonstrates the strong link between the pornographic literature read by the ten year old offender and the crime he committed on a six year old girl.

At the preliminary examination, the police gave evidence that they had attended at the young boy's home on the day they arrested him and collected a large box of pornographic magazines. The box of magazines, numbering about 50, were all pornographic magazines of the most explicit kind. Each of the sexual acts inflicted on the girl were graphically depicted in close up colour photographs in those magazines.

A very experienced forensic psychologist said:

"It would further appear that one of the significant contributing factors in relation to this behaviour at the time was his discovery of pornographic magazines and video films belonging to his elder brother aged 19, which were concealed in that sibling's bedroom. This in turn appears to have aroused his curiosity and lead to this most unfortunate sequence of events."

The young offender said he had discovered the pornography prior to the offence and had viewed the magazines alone and watched the pornographic videos on television and had become sexually aroused.

Case study 3

In July, 1989 a nineteen year old prostitute engaged a male customer in St Kilda, Melbourne. The deal was \$50 for oral sex only. She

performed oral sex as agreed, but he then became violent and demanded free vaginal and anal sex. He then forced her fist up her vagina causing her severe pain.

A few weeks later, he indecently assaulted another prostitute by forcing his fist into her vagina in a punching action, causing her to scream in pain.

The offender pleaded guilty, and in sentencing him the County Court judge said:

"The indecent assault on the same woman, and on another prostitute, were more invasive and traumatic, having as I accept you did, watched a number of video cassettes that demonstrated the technique of inserting a human fist into the vagina."

When the police arrested him they searched his house and found a large number of pornographic videos and magazines. The magazines included the title "Fist Fucking".

When interviewed by the police he was asked "... would it be fair to say that fist fucking would be your fantasy?" and he replied "Yeah". He agreed that what he had done to these women had been a re-enactment of what appeared on the videos found in his house.

Nexus between pornography and violence

I believe it is highly probable that the present levels of violent crime and violent sex crime in Australia are linked to the proliferation of increasingly violent and pornographic videos, magazines and other material. In my view, the time has now come for all Australian Governments to pass and enforce the necessary legislation to control the distribution of this material in Australia. I believe that my sample study of actual case histories clearly establishes in each case the very strong probability that the videos and magazines, which each of these offenders viewed, were a significant motivating factor in the subsequent violence and sexual assaults which occurred. There is also a significant body of academic research overseas and in Australia which supports my conclusions. Many reported cases also demonstrate the link, such as the video recorded interview with Ted Bundy a few hours before his execution in Florida in January 1989. Much of the academic work which claims there is no causal link is based on social science evidence consisting of experimental studies with university students in clinical surroundings or interviews with people who view X rated videos, many of whom would be unlikely to admit to interviewers that the

pornographic material they are using makes them imitate what they have seen.

There have also been a number of inquiries in the United States, the United Kingdom and in Australia. The value of that type of research is greatly diminished unless it includes in depth actual case studies. Future research must include actual case studies and interviews with police, prosecution authorities, forensic psychiatrists and others dealing with violence in the front line.

With the present level of violent crime and violent sexual crime, the onus of proving that there is no significant link between pornography and imitative criminal behaviour, lies squarely with those who assert, contrary to human experience, that there is no such causal link.

Except in exceptional circumstances, I do not believe in censorship, but common sense dictates that we have gone too far and some restrictions need to be put in place.

Richard Read is a Prosecutor for the Queen in Victoria. He has practised as a barrister for 21 years. This is an edited extract of a paper delivered at the Second Melbourne Criminal Justice Symposium.

CENSORSHIP SEMINAR

On 14 August 1992 CAMLA hosted, in conjunction with the Free Speech Committee, an extremely successful seminar on censorship in the 1990's. CAMLA wishes to thank all speakers and chairpersons at the seminar for giving so freely of their time. Elizabeth Johnstone also deserves special thanks for her time and efforts in organising the seminar. An edited selection of the papers delivered at the seminar will be published in the next issue of the Bulletin.