



PROTECTING INNOCENCE

THE ADULT-CHILD PORNOGRAPHY LINK

BY **PATRICK A. TRUEMAN**

President and CEO
Morality In Media

Former Chief
Child Exploitation and
Obscenity Section,
U.S. Department of Justice

www.PornHarms.com

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ESTABLISHED 1962

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Ending child pornography is as much a matter of vigorously prosecuting those who distribute adult pornography, as it is a matter of prosecuting child pornographers. The President of the United States should pledge to initiate adult pornography criminal cases and fund research into the adult-child pornography link.

Since President Obama took office, the Department of Justice has not initiated one adult pornography criminal case. The reason, we are told, is that investigators are overwhelmed with child pornography cases. Problematically, a growing number of law enforcement officers and investigators report that consumption of adult pornography leads to consumption of child pornography.

The link between adult and child porn is observed globally, and it is nothing new. Fifteen years ago, at the 1996 World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, Margaret Healy stated in a paper titled "Child Pornography: An International Perspective" that "with the emergence of the use of computers to traffic in child pornography, a new and growing segment of producers and consumers is being identified. They are individuals who may not have a sexual preference for children, but who have seen the gamut of adult pornography and who are searching for more bizarre material." [Emphasis added]

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Ten years ago, Muireann O'Brian also observed this in her work with child sexual abusers. She heads the Bangkok office of End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism, a global organization that helps police and lawyers target child molesters. She pointed out that "arrests have shown men with perfectly normal sexual proclivities become seduced, then involved and finally addicted to child pornography. Their addiction may manifest itself by them just keeping and looking at the images ... But it has been found that the addition leads many men into seeking out children to abuse." [Emphasis added]

RISE IN INTERNET AND PORNOGRAPHY

Today, a simple Google search of news articles demonstrates that what Healy and O'Brian saw years ago is now common. In a 2008 story describing the increase of child sex crimes in Spain experts attributed the surge in such crimes to Internet opportunities. "The web not only provides an outlet for people with deep-rooted pedophilic tendencies, but can

also create a sexual attraction to children," Guillermo Canovas explained. He is the president of the association Protegeles in Spain which seeks to protect children from Internet pedophiles. He points out that "studies show that some pedophiles feel attracted to children from an early age, but the majority of them develop the tendency later on ... Thousands of people are constantly looking for pornography on the web ... as their stimulation threshold rises, they feel the need for stronger and stronger material until their search leads them to child pornography."

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The congressionally-created Child Online Protection Act (COPA) Commission saw the need to curb adult obscenity as a necessary precursor for combating child pornography. It included a recommendation in its 2000 Final Report "that Government at all levels fund aggressive programs to investigate and prosecute violations of obscenity laws ... This investigation and prosecution program should supplement the Government's existing effort to investigate and prosecute child sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, and child pornography ... Such a program should be of sufficient magnitude to deter effectively illegal activity on the Internet."

Since the advent of the Internet age, millions of federal and state tax dollars have been channeled toward fighting Internet child pornography. Like many government programs, those targeting child pornography are on autopilot, gobbling up ever-increasing resources with no critical evaluation of effectiveness. Rather, "sucess" seems to be counted by the number of arrests and convictions. By that measure, law enforcement successes climb every year, regardless of the safety of our nation's children. No credible claim is made that children are safer today than at the beginning of the Internet age. The number of child pornographers is increasing, not decreasing. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the main sex exploitation offense referred to U.S. attorneys shifted from sex abuse (73%) in 1994 to child pornography (69%) in 2006. Child pornography matters accounted for 82% of the growth in sex exploitation matters referred from 1994 to 2006.

The U.S. Department of Justice must change course and begin vigorously to enforce adult as well as child pornography laws. Additionally, no researcher has yet published a study that uses empirical science to validate the link between adult

and child pornography that so many who fight child pornography and molestation have observed. The U.S. Department of Justice doles out hundreds of millions of dollars for crime research, ostensibly to discover ways to make us safer. The link between adult and child pornography should now be a top target of research.

RISE IN CHILD ADDICTION TO PORNOGRAPHY

Children are harmed not only by child pornographers, but also by the consumption of adult pornography. The average age of a child's first exposure to pornography is 11. A total of 90 percent of children ages 8-16 have viewed pornography online. Many are becoming addicted to freely available Internet pornography. The effects of pornography are powerful on their developing brains. Eric M. Johnson, a clinical psychologist and full-time forensic evaluator who directs the Oregon Forensic Institute says that some children who encounter pornography "are captured by the images." Johnson treats kids in trouble for sexual behavior and has observed how his patients use the Internet to view pornography: "For them it becomes something very different, and they become obsessed. They think about it all the time ... and so it begins to dominate their lives." There is also evidence that the rise in child-on-child sexual abuse appears to flow from consumption of Internet pornography.

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Since the Internet came into its own nearly 20 years ago, Congress has tried to protect children from online pornography through the Communications Decency Act (CDA) and COPA. Unfortunately, the United States Supreme Court has declared both laws unconstitutional. The acts would have removed "teaser" porn from the front pages of Internet pornography sites. This kind of material induces those whose eyes it catches to pay for more material beyond the front page. Under these acts, adults seeking porn could procure it only by providing credit card or other information that a child would not have. Children would not see any pornography on the sites.

When these acts were stricken, Congress seemed to give up on attempts to protect children from pornography on the Internet. Remarkably, it seems that no one at the top level in the Department of Justice has considered that the one effective – and constitutional – way to protect children from

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harm would be the vigorous prosecution of illegal, hardcore adult pornography. Federal laws prohibit distribution of hardcore adult pornography (called "obscenity" in law) on the Internet, on cable/satellite TV, through the mail or common carrier, in retail shops, and on hotel/motel TV. A handful of companies control large numbers of porn sites, so a few well-placed prosecutions would go a long way in cleaning up the Internet, where most kids find hardcore pornography.

GOVERNMENT SHOULD PROVIDE PROTECTION

Is the protection of children from pornography a government responsibility? Yes, of course it is. Practically speaking, no parent can watch over his or her children 24 hours a day. Even when parents utilize pornography-blocking software in their own home, kids will have access to the material at friends' homes or even at many public libraries. The predatory pornography industry targets children with their teaser material, including entire websites distributing volumes of hardcore porn for free.

Parents need help, and since the Congress has seen fit to outlaw distribution of obscene Internet pornography not only to children but to adults as well, why should parents not be able to rely on authorities to enforce the law? Who is it that gave the Department of Justice a pass simply to look the other way, dismissing the will of Congress and helping pornographers target our kids? It is time to reconsider this informal grant of immunity to the porn criminals and think first of the welfare of our children.

The President of the United States should order his attorney general to protect our children from pornography and that means committing to the vigorous prosecution of illegal adult pornography as well as child pornography.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Patrick A. Trueman is President of Morality in Media. He served as chief of the United States Department of Justice, Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section, Criminal Division, Washington, D. C. from 1987 to 1993.



A Publication of **MORALITY IN MEDIA**

Morality In Media
1100 G Street NW #1030
Washington, DC 20005
202-393-7245
EMAIL: grassroots@pornharms.org

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